



RAMAKRISHNA THE MAN-G  
AND THE UNIVERSAL GOS  
OF VIVEKANANDA

(A STUDY OF MYSTICISM AND ACTI  
LIVING INDIA)

VOLUME I 115  
— 20.







Sri Ramakrishna

# THE LIFE OF RAMAKRISHNA

BY  
ROMAIN ROLLAND

*Translated from the original French by*  
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ADVAITA ASHRAMA  
MAYAVATI, ALMORA, HIMALAYAS  
1944

Published by  
KIVAMI PAVITHRANANDA  
ARUNACHALAM  
MADRAS  
For sale in India including Rangoon  
Ceylon and F.M.S. only

Third Edition

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Mukherjee, at the Art 1  
ish Indian Street, Calcutta.

ATLANTIC, LANCET, &c.  
THE LANCET, LONDON, 1851  
AND THE LANCET, &c.

MAN must rest, get his breath, refresh himself  
at the great living wells, which keep the fresh-  
ness of the eternal. Where are they to be found,  
I ask not in the cradle of our race, on the sacred  
heights, whence flow on the one side the Indus  
and the Ganges, on the other the torrents of  
Persia, the rivers of Paradise? The West is too  
narrow. Greece is small. I stifle there. Judæa  
is dry. I pant there. Let me look towards  
Asia and the profound East for a little while.  
There lies my great poem, as vast as the Indian  
ocean, blessed, gilded with the sun, the book of  
divine harmony wherein is no dissonance. A  
serene peace reigns there, and in the midst of  
conflict an infinite sweetness, a boundless frater-  
nity, which spreads over all living things, an  
ocean (without bottom or bound) of love, of pity,  
of clemency. I have found the object of my  
search: The Bible of kindness."

— *Bible of Humanity*, 1861





TO  
MY FAITHFUL COMPANION  
IN THIS PILGRIMAGE OF THE SOUL  
MY SISTER MADELEINE  
WITHOUT WHOM  
I SHOULD NOT HAVE BEEN ABLE  
TO ACCOMPLISH THIS LONG JOURNEY  
R. R.  
JANUARY, 1929

book. But these are for the most part mere matters of detail and do not substantially detract from the brilliance and excellence of the study presented by our author.

We have added a note of our own on Sri Hama-krishna and Keshab Chandra Sen towards the end of the volume and omitted a few footnotes with the approval of M. Holland.

PUBLISHERS

August 1977

# श्री जुबली नागरी भण्ड,

पुस्तकालय एवं वाचनालय

स्टेशन रोड, बी.कानेर

IN writing these two books I have had constant recourse to the advice of the Ramakrishna Mission, which has been kind enough to place all the requisite documents at my disposal. In particular I owe a great deal to the present venerable head of the Belur Math and Superior of the Order, Swami Shivananda, who has been good enough to give me his precious personal memories of the Master; to the Master's pious direct disciple and Evangelist, Mahendra Nath Gupta, whose name is modestly concealed behind the simple initial M, to the young and religious savant, Boshu Sen, a disciple of Sir J. C. Bose and a devotee of Vivekananda, who with her permission communicated to me the unpublished Memoirs of Sister Christine, she who with Sister Nivedita was the most intimate of Vivekananda's Western disciples, to Miss Josephine MacLeod, who was an active and devoted friend of the great Swami, above all to the editor of the Review, *Prabuddha Bharata*, Swami Ashokananda, who has never failed of my unwearied questions, but has answered them with the most precise erudition. It was he who gave me the most complete information with regard to the actual position of the Ramakrishna Mission.

I must also express my gratitude to Mr. Dhanopal Mukerji, who first revealed Ramakrishna's existence to me, and to my faithful friend, Dr.



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## TO MY EASTERN READERS<sup>1</sup>

"Greeting to the feet of the Jñānin! Greeting to the feet of the Bhakta! Greeting to the devout who believe in the formless God! Greeting to those who believe in God with form! Greeting to the men of old who knew Brahman! Greeting to the modern knowers of Truth. . ."

*(RamaKrishna, October 28, 1882)*

I must beg my Indian readers to view with indulgence the mistakes I may have made. In spite of all the enthusiasm I have brought to my task, it is impossible for a man of the West to interpret men of Asia with their thousand years' experience of thought; for such an interpretation must often be erroneous. The only thing to which I can testify is the sincerity which has led me to make a pious attempt to enter into all forms of life.



is fleshman. For that, although it knows it not, is a form of nationalism of spirit and I cannot accept it. I see that in all that exists. I see Him as completely in the least fragment as in the whole Cosmos. There is no difference of essence. And power is universally infinite, that which lies hidden in an atom. If one only knew it, would blow up a whole world. The only difference is that it is more or less concentrated in the heart of a conscience, in an ego, or in a unit of energy, an *idm*. The very greatest of men is only a clearer reflection of the Sun which gleams in each drop of dew.

That is why I can never make that sacred gulf so pleasing to the devout, between the heroes of the soul and the thousands of their obscure companions past and present. And neither more nor less than I isolate Christ or Buddha, do I isolate Ramakrishna and Vivekananda from the great army of the Spirit marching on in their own time. I shall try in the course of this book to do justice to those personalities of genius, who during the last century have sprung up in reawakened India, reviving the ancient energies of their country and bringing about a springtime of thought within her borders. The work of each one was creative and each one collected round him a band of faithful souls who formed themselves into a church and unconsciously looked upon that church as the temple of the one or of the greatest God.

At this distance from their differences I refuse to see the dust of battle, at this distance the hedges between the fields melt into an immense expanse. I can only see



## TO MY WESTERN READERS

I have dedicated my whole life to the reconciliation of mankind. I have striven to bring it about among the peoples of Europe, especially between those two great Western peoples, who are brethren and yet enemies. For the last ten years I have been attempting the same task for the West and the East. I also desire to reconcile, if it is possible, the two antithetical forms of spirit for which the West and the East are wrongly supposed to stand—reason and faith—or perhaps it would be more accurate to say, the diverse forms of reason and of faith; for the West and the East share them both almost equally although few suspect it.

In our days an absurd separation has been made between these two halves of the soul, and it is presumed that they are incompatible. The only incompatibility lies in the narrowness of view, which those who erroneously claim to be their representatives, share in common.

On the one hand, those who call themselves religious shut themselves up within the four walls of their chapel, and not only refuse to come out (as they have a right to do), but they would deny to all outside those four walls the right to live, if they could. On the other hand, the free-thinkers, who are for the most part without any religious sense at all (as they have a right to be), too often consider it their mission in life to fight against religious souls and in turn deny their right

exist. The result is the futile spectacle of a systematic attempt to destroy religion on the part of men, who do not perceive that they are attacking something which they do not understand. A discussion of religion based solely on historical or pseudo-historical texts, rendered sterile by time and covered with lichen, is of no avail. As well explain the fact of inner psychological life by the dissection of the physical organs through which it flows. The confusion created by our rationalists between the outward expression and the power of thought seems to me as illusory as the confusion common to the religions of past ages of identifying magic powers with the words, the syllables or the letters which are their outward expression.

munism, Humanitarianism, Nationalism and even Rationalism. It is the quality of thought and not its object which determines its source and allows us to decide whether or not it emanates from religion. If it turns fearlessly towards the search for truth at all costs with single-minded sincerity prepared for any sacrifice, I should call it religious; for it presupposes faith in an end to human effort higher than the life of the individual, at times higher than the life of existing society, and even higher than the life of humanity as a whole. Scepticism itself when it proceeds from vigorous natures true to the core, when it is an expression of strength and not of weakness, joins in the march of the Grand Army of the religious Soul.

On the other hand, thousands of cowardly believers, clerical and lay, within the churches have no right to wear the colours of religion. They do not believe because they choose to believe, but wallow in the stable where they were born in front of mangers full of the grain of comfortable beliefs upon which all they have to do is to ruminate.

The tragic words used of Christ—that He will be in agony to the end of the world<sup>1</sup>—are well known. I myself do not believe in *one personal God*, least of all in a God of Sorrow only. But I believe that in all that exists, including joy and sorrow and with them all forms of life, in mankind, and in men and in the Universe, the only

<sup>1</sup> Pascal: *Pensées*; *Le Mystère de Jésus*. "Jésus sera en agonie jusqu'à la fin du monde; il ne faut pas dormir pendant ce temps-là."

God is He who is a perpetual birth. The creation takes place anew every instant. Religion is never accomplished. It is ceaseless action and the will to strive—the outpouring of a spring, never a stagnant pond.

I belong to a land of rivers. I love them as if they were living creatures, and I understand why my ancestors offered them oblations of wine and milk. Now of all rivers the most sacred is that which gushes out eternally from the depths of the soul, from its rocks and sands and glaciers. Therein lies primeval Force and that is what I call religion. Everything belongs to this river of the Soul, flowing from the dark unplumbed reservoir of our being down the inevitable slope to the Ocean of the conscious, realised and mastered Being. And just as the water condenses and rises in vapour from the sea to the clouds of the sky to fill again the reservoir of the rivers, the cycles of creation proceed in uninterrupted succession. From the source to the sea, from the sea to the source, everything consists of the same Energy, of the Being without beginning and without end. It matters not to me whether the Being be called God (and which God?) or Force (and what Force? It may equally be called Matter, but what manner of matter is it when it includes the forces of the Spirit?) Words, words, nothing but words! Unity, living and not abstract, is the essence of it all. And it is that which I adore, the great believers and the ho . . . , it within them con- alike adore.

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<sup>1</sup> Pascal: *P*  
*en agonie jus*  
*pendant ce*

*de Jésus :*  
*et il ne*





To her, to the Great Goddess, the inviolable, the immanent, who gathers in her golden arms the multiform, multicoloured sheaf of polyphony—to Unity—I dedicate this new work.

For a century in new India Unity has been the target for the arrows of all archers. Many personalities throughout this century have sprung from her sacred earth, a veritable Ganges of peoples and thought. Whatever may be the differences between them, their goal is ever the same—human unity through God. And through all the changes of workmen Unity itself has expanded and gained in precision.

From first to last this great movement has been one of co-operation on a footing of complete equality between the West and the East, between the powers of reason and those—not of faith in the sense of blind acceptance, a sense it has gained in servile ages among exhausted races—but of vital and penetrating intuition—the eye in the forehead of the Cyclops which completes but does not cancel the other two.

From this magnificent procession of spiritual heroes whom we shall survey later<sup>1</sup> I have chosen two men, who have won my regard because with incomparable charm and power they have realised this splendid symphony of the Universal Soul. They are, if one may say so, its Mozart and its Beethoven—*Pater Seraphicus* and Jove the Thunderer—Ramakrishna and Vivekananda.

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter VI of this volume—"The Builders of Unity" (Ram Mohun Roy, Devendranath Tagore, Keshab Chunder Sen, Dayananda). Cf. also *India on the March* (*Review Europe*, December 13, 1928), where I have found a place for our great contemporary, Aurobindo Ghose.



The subject of this book<sup>1</sup> is threefold and yet one. It comprises the story of two extraordinary lives—one half legendary, the other a veritable epic—unfolded before us in our own time, and the account of a lofty system of thought, at once religious and philosophic, moral and social, with its message for modern humanity from the depths of India's past.

Although (as you will see for yourselves) the pathetic interest, the charming poetry, the grace and Homeric grandeur of these two lives are sufficient to explain why I have spent two years of my own in exploring and tracing their course in order to show them to you, it was not the curiosity of an explorer that prompted me to undertake the journey.

I am no dilettante and I do not bring to jaded readers the opportunity to lose themselves, but rather to find themselves—to find their true selves, naked and without the mask of falsehood. My companions have ever been men with just that object in view, whether living or dead, and the limits of centuries or of races mean little to me. There is neither East nor West for the naked soul; such things are merely its trappings. The whole world is its home. And as its home is each one of us, it belongs to all of us.

Perhaps I may be excused if I put myself for a brief space upon the stage in order to explain the source of inner thought that has given birth to this work. I do this only by way of example, for I am not an exceptional man. I am one of the people of France. I know that I represent

<sup>1</sup> In two volumes

thousands of Westerners, who have neither the means nor the time to express themselves. Whenever one of us speaks from the depths of his heart in order to free his own self, his voice liberates at the same time thousands of silent voices. Then listen, not to my voice, but to the echo of theirs.

I was born and spent the first fourteen years of my life in a part of *central France*, where my family had been established for centuries. Our line is purely French and Catholic without any foreign admixture. And the early environment wherein I was sealed until my arrival in Paris about 1880 was an old district of the Nivernais where nothing from the outside world was allowed to penetrate within its charmed circle.

So in this closed vase modelled from the clay of *Gaul with its flaxen blue sky and its rivers* I discovered all the colours of the universe during my childhood. When staff in hand in later years I scoured the roads of thought, I found nothing that was strange in any country. All the aspects of mind that I found or felt were in their origin the same as mine. Outside experience merely brought me the realisation of my own mind, the states of which I had noted but to which I had no key. Neither *Shakespeare nor Beethoven nor Tolstoy nor Rome*, the masters that nurtured me, ever revealed anything to me except the "Open Sesame" of my subterranean city, my *Herculanum*, sleeping under its lava. And I am convinced that it sleeps in the depths of many of those around us. But they are ignorant of its existence just as I was. For

first stage of excavation, which their own practical common sense has shown them to be necessary for their daily use, and they economise their needs like those masters who forged first the royal and then the Jacobin unity of France. I admire the structure. An historian by profession, I see in it one of the masterpieces of human effort enlightened by the spirit. "*Aere perrenius* . . ." But according to the old legend which demanded that if a work was to endure a living body should be immured in the walls, our master architects have entombed in their mortar thousands of warm human souls. They can no longer be seen beneath the marble facing and the Roman cement. But I can hear them! And whoever listens will hear them as I do under the noble liturgy of "classic" thought. The Mass celebrated on the High Altar takes no heed of them. But the faithful, the docile and inattentive crowd kneeling and standing at the given signal, ruminate in their dreams upon quite different herbs of St. John.\* France is rich in souls. But she hides them as an old peasant woman hides her money.

I have just rediscovered the key of the lost staircase leading to some of these proscribed souls. The staircase in the wall, spiral like the coils of a serpent, winds from the subterranean depths of the Ego to the high terraces crowned by the stars. But nothing that I saw there was unknown country. I had seen it all before and I knew it well—but I did not know where I had

\* Horace "More eternal than the ages"

\* On the Feast of St. John all kinds of herbs are sold in the fairs, having so-called magic properties

when it belated. More than once I had recited from memory, though imperfectly, the lesson of thought learned at some former time (but from whom? One of my very ancient selves . . .). Now I reread it, every word clear and complete, in the book of life held out to me by the illiterate genius who knew all its pages by heart—*Ramakrishna*.

In my turn I present him to you, not as a new book but as a very old one, which you have all tried to spell out (though many stopped short at the alphabet). Eventually it is always the same book but the writing varies. The eye usually remains fixed on the cover and does not pierce to the kernel.

It is always the same Book. It is always the same Man—the Son of Man, the Eternal, Our Son, Our God reborn. With each return he reveals himself a little more fully, and more enriched by the universe.

Allowing for differences of country and of time *Ramakrishna* is the younger brother of our Christ.

We can show, if we choose, and as free-thinking exegesis is trying to do to-day, that the whole doctrine of Christ was current before him in the Oriental soul seminated by the thinkers of Chaldaea, Egypt, Athens and Ionia. But we can never stop the person of Christ, whether real or legendary (they are merely two orders of the same reality<sup>1</sup>), from prevailing, and rightly so, in the history of mankind over the personality of a

<sup>1</sup> The attitude of religious Indians with regard to legend is a curious and critical one akin to faith. It is very remarkable that the historic existence of the personalities they worship as Gods is almost a matter of indifference—

Plato. It is a monumental and necessary creation of the Soul of humanity. It is its most beautiful fruit belonging to one of its autumns. The same tree has produced, according to the same law of nature, the life and the legend. They are both made of the same living body and are the emanation of its look, its breath and its moisture.

I am bringing to Europe, as yet unaware of it, the fruit of a new autumn, a new message of the Soul, the symphony of India, bearing the name of Ramakrishna. It can be shown (and we shall not fail to point out) that this symphony, like those of our classical masters, is built up of a hundred different musical elements emanating from the past. But the sovereign personality concentrating in himself the diversity of these elements and fashioning them into a royal harmony, is always the one who gives his name to the work, though it contains within itself the

"But to-day Krishna is the most perfect of the Avatârs "

And he worshipped him. (Cf. Sister Nivedita. *Notes of some Wanderings with the Swami Vivekananda*).

Truly religious souls recognise the living God just as much in the stamp with which He has marked the brains of a people as in the reality of an Incarnation. They are two equal realities in the eyes of a great believer, for whom everything that is real is God. And he can never impose—the creation of a people or the creation of an age.

<sup>1</sup> In 1902. He was 27½ years old. His great Disciple, Vivekananda, died in 1902 at the age of thirty-nine. It should never be forgotten how recently they lived. We have seen the same sun, and the same raft of time has borne us.

<sup>2</sup> The life of Vivekananda was quite different, for he traversed the Old and the New Worlds.

<sup>3</sup> "Show Thyself, O Godless with the dark stones! . . .  
Thou art one and many, Thou conquerest the thousands  
and Thou silent the field of battle with the enemy! . . ."  
(Hymn to the Goddess of Earth, Shakti.)

<sup>4</sup> *Pathway Opened*

According to the Vedānta, when Brahman the Absolute  
is no longer endowed with qualities and begins to evolve the

"I am more ancient than the radiant Gods. I am the first-born of the Being. I am the artery of Immortality."

It is my desire to bring the sound of the beating of that artery to the ears of fever-stricken Europe, which has murdered sleep. I wish to wet its lips with the blood of Immortality

R. R

Christmas, 1928

श्री जुबली नगरी भण्ड.  
पुस्तकालय एव वाचनालय  
स्टेशन रोड, बीकानेर

first-born of Being, which is the Essence of all things visible and invisible. He who speaks thus is supposed to have attained complete identity with Him.





# THE LIFE OF RAMAKRISHNA



पुस्तकालय एवं वाचनान्तर

# THE LIFE OF RAMAKRISHNA

## PRELUDE

I shall begin my story as if it were a fable. But it is an extraordinary fact that this ancient legend, belonging apparently to the realm of mythology, is in reality the account of men who were living yesterday, our neighbours in the "century", and that people alive to-day have seen them with their own eyes.<sup>1</sup> I have received glowing testimony at their hands. I have talked with some among them, who were the companions of this mystic being—of the Man-Gods<sup>2</sup>—and I can vouch for their loyalty. Moreover, these eye-witnesses are not the simple fishermen of the Gospel story; some are great thinkers, learned in European thought and disciplined in its strict school. And yet they speak as men of three thousand years ago.

The co-existence in one and the same brain in

<sup>1</sup> At the date when this book was being written (the autumn of 1923) the following direct disciples and witnesses of Ramakrishna were still living:

Swami Shivananda, the Abbot of the central Math (tery) at Belur near Calcutta and the President of the Ramakrishna Mission, Swami Abhedananda, Akhandananda, Swami Subodhinanda, Swami Ananda, Swami Vinodananda, Mahendra Nath Chattopadhyaya, the author of Discourses with the Master under the Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna, Rāmlāl Chatterji, Ramakrishna's nephew, not to mention more lay disciples, it is difficult to trace.

<sup>2</sup> The word 'Man-Gods' is used to indicate that Ramakrishna was believed to be the incarnation not only of the Supreme, but of the other Gods.—Translator

this our twentieth century of scientific reason and the visionary spirit of ancient times, when as in the Greek age, gods and goddesses shared the bed and the board of mortal man, or as in the age of Galilee, when against the pale summer sky the heavenly winged messenger was seen bringing the Annunciation to a Virgin, who bent meekly under the gift—this is what our wise men cannot imagine; they are no longer mad enough. And indeed therein lies the real miracle, the richness of this world that they do not know how to enjoy. The majority of European thinkers shut themselves up on their own particular floor of the house of mankind; and although this floor may be stored with libraries containing the history of the other floors inhabited in the past, the rest of the house seems to them to be uninhabited, and they never hear from the floors above or below them the footsteps of their neighbours. In the concert of the world the orchestra is made up of all the centuries past and present, and they all play at the same time; but each has his eyes fixed upon his own stand and on the conductor's baton; he hears nothing but his own instrument.

*But let us listen to the whole splendid harmony of the present, wherein the past dreams and the future aspirations of all races and all ages are blended. For those who have ears to hear every second contains the song of humanity from the*

is obliterated. Listen! but listen with your ears. Let books be silent! They talk too much. . .

If there is one place on the face of the earth where all the dreams of living men have found a home from the very earliest days when man began the dream of existence, it is India. Her unique privilege, as Barth<sup>1</sup> has shown with great clearness, has been that of a great elder sister, whose spiritual development, an autonomous flower continuously growing throughout the Methuselah-long life of the peoples, has never been interrupted. For more than thirty centuries the tree of Vision, with all its thousand branches and their millions of twigs, has sprung from that torrid land, the burning womb of the gods. It renews itself tirelessly, showing no signs of decay, all kinds of fruit ripen upon its boughs at the same time; side by side are found all kinds of gods from the most savage to the highest—to the formless God, the Unnamable, the Boundless One. . . Always the same tree.

And the substance and thought of its interlaced branches, through which the same sap runs, have been so closely knit together, that from root to topmost twig the whole tree is vibrant, like the mast of the great ship of the Earth, and it sings one great symphony, composed of the thousand voices and the thousand faiths of mankind. Its polyphony, discordant and confused at first to unaccustomed ears, discovers to the trained ear its secret hierarchy and great hidden form. Moreover, those who have once heard<sup>2</sup>! can no longer

<sup>1</sup> A. Barth *The Religions of India*, 1979

be satisfied with the rude and artificial order imposed amid desolation by Western reason and its faith or faiths, all equally tyrannical and mutually contradictory. What doth it profit a man to reign over a world for the most part enslaved, debased or destroyed? Better to reign over life, comprehended, revered and embraced as one great whole, wherein he must learn to co-ordinate its opposing forces in an exact equilibrium.

This is the supreme knowledge we can learn from "Universe Souls," and it is some beautiful examples of such souls that I wish to depict. The secret of their mastery and their serenity is not that of the "lilies of the field, arrayed in glory, who toil not, neither do they spin." They weave the clothes for those who go naked. They have spun the thread of Ariadne to guide us through the mazes of the labyrinth. We have only to hold the length of their thread in our hands to find the right path, the path, which rises from the vast morasses of the soul inhabited by primitive gods stuck fast in the mire, to the peaks crowned by the outspread wings of heaven — *Τίταν ἄσπερος* — the intangible Spirit.

And in the life of Ramakrishna, the Man-Gods, I am about to relate the life of this Jacob's ladder, whereon the two-fold unbroken line of the Divine in man ascends and descends between heaven and earth.

<sup>1</sup> Empedocles "the Titan Ether"

## THE GOSPEL OF CHILDHOOD<sup>1</sup>

AT Kāmārpukur, one of the conical villages of Bengal, set in the midst of palm trees, pools and rice fields, lived an old orthodox Brahmin couple, called Chattopādhvāya. They were very poor and very pious, devotees of the cult of the heroic and virtuous Rāma. The father, a man as upright as the men of old, had been despoiled of all he possessed, because he had refused to bear false witness to the advantage of the great landowner, who was his neighbour. He received a visitation

<sup>1</sup> Note—I must warn my European readers that in describing this critical faculties held) I have i flute under the need not conce facts, but only signs. To unde

am concerned rather with the dream fashioned under the fingers of a good workman. A great master of learning has set us an example in this. Max Müller, a faithful adherent of the critical methods of the West, and at the same time a respecter of other forms of thought, took down from the lips of Vivekananda an account of the life of the Paramahansa and faithfully reproduced it in his precious little book\*. For he maintained that what he calls the "dialogic or dialectic process," used to describe



from the Gods. Although he was then sixty years of age he went on a pilgrimage to Gaya, where is an imprint of the foot of the Lord Vishnu.<sup>1</sup> The Lord appeared to him during the night, and said: "I am about to be reborn for the salvation of the world."

About the same time in Kamarpukur his wife, Chandramani, dreamt that she had been possessed by a God. In the temple opposite her cottage the divine image of Shiva quickened to life under her eyes. A ray of light penetrated to the depths of her being. Under the storm Chandramani was overthrown and fainted. When she came to herself, she had conceived. Her husband on his return found her transfigured. She heard voices, she carried a God.<sup>2</sup>

The child, whom the world was to know as Rāmakrishna, was born on February 18, 1836. But the gay name with the tripping cadences of a bell, that he bore in childhood, was Gadādhara. He was a little boy full of fun and life, mischievous and charming, with a feminine grace he preserved to the end of his life. Nobody imagined—himself least of all—what infinite spaces, what tremendous depths lay hidden in the little body of this laughing child. They were revealed to him when he was six years old. One day in June or July (1842) he was sauntering along with a meal, as small as a bird's, of a little puffed rice carried in a fold of his garment. He was going to the fields.

<sup>1</sup> Buddha is now regarded by the people as one of the incarnations of Vishnu.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

"I was following a narrow path between the rice fields. I raised my eyes to the sky as I munched my rice. I saw a great black cloud spreading rapidly until it covered the heavens. Suddenly at the edge of the cloud a flight of snow-white cranes passed over my head. The contrast was so beautiful that my spirit wandered far away. I lost consciousness and fell to the ground. The puffed rice was scattered. Somebody picked me up and carried me home in his arms. An access of joy and emotion overcame me . . . Thus was the first time that I was seized with ecstasy."

He was destined thus to pass half his life

Even in this first ecstasy the real character of the divine impress on the soul of this child can be seen. Artistic emotion, a passionate instinct for the beautiful, was the first channel bringing him into contact with God. There are—as we shall see—many other paths along which revelation may come, either love of a dear one, or thought, or self-mastery, or honest and disinterested labour, or compassion or meditation. He came to know them all, but the most immediate and natural with him was delight in the beautiful face of God, which he saw in all that he looked upon. He was a born artist. In this how greatly he differs from that other great soul, the Mahātmā of India, whose European evangelist I have already become—Gāndhī, the man without art, the man without visions, who does not even desire them, who mistrusts them rather—the man who lives in God through reasoned action, as is inevitable in a born leader

the path of Hinduism is a lot more dangerous now, but it is worth following, from the perspective of the Hindu religion. It is the way of life.

It is the way of life, particularly the way of life in Bengal, where, a race of artists and poets. Its inspired guide had been the mystic love of Krishna, Chaitanya, as his most exquisite music the delicious songs of Chaitanya and Advaita. These ecstatic masters, the greatest flowers of their race, have impregnated it

Chaitanya (1485-1533) the descendant of a family of Bengal Brahmins, after having achieved a great reputation as a theologian and scholar, was struck off the path of the old religion with its paralyzing formalism. He went out into the highways to preach a new gospel of love founded on devotion, union with God. It was open to all men and women of all religions and all castes as brothers and even to those without caste. Mahatmas, Hindu beggars, paupers, thieves, prostitutes, all came together to listen to his burning message and went away purified and strengthened.

An extraordinary Awakening was heralded during the course of a century by the songs of a series of wonderful poets. The most exquisite of these singers was Chaitanya, the poor priest of a ruined temple in Bengal, the lover of a young peasant girl, whom he hymned in ecstatic love in a number of immortal little poems. Nothing in the treasury of our European literature can surpass the touching beauty of these divine elegies. Advaita, the aristocrat, whose inspiration was a Queen, attained by refined art to the natural perfection of the simple Chaitanya, but his key is a more joyful one. (My earnest desire is to see some real Western poet transplanting these songs into our own garden. There they would bloom afresh in every true heart.)

Chaitanya's disciples spread throughout Bengal. They went from village to village, singing and dancing to a new form of music called Kirtan, the wandering Hindu, the Hindu Soul, seeking the Divine Love. The Ganges hymns and the peasants took up this dream of the Awakened Sleeper, and his melodious echoes still fill the western art of Tagore, especially in the *Gardener* and the *Chaitanya*. The feet of the child Ramakrishna moved to the rhythm of these Kirtans. He drank the milk of

with their fragrance so that Bengal has been intoxicated with it for centuries. The soul of the little Ramakrishna was made of the same substance, it was flesh of their flesh, and he was looked upon as a flowering branch of the tree of Chaitanya.<sup>1</sup>

The lover of divine beauty, the artistic genius as yet unaware of itself, appears again in a later ecstasy. One night during the festival of Shiva this child of eight years old, a passionate lover of music and poetry, a skilful modeller of images and the leader of a small dramatic troupe of boys of his own age, was taking the part of Shiva in the sacred representation, suddenly his being was possessed by his hero, tears of joy coursed down his little cheeks, he lost himself in the glory of God; he was transported like Ganymede by the Eagle carrying the thunderbolt—he was thought to be dead . . .

From that time the ecstasies became more frequent. In Europe the case would have been foredoomed and the child would have been placed

this Vaishnavite music, and it is true to say that he himself became its masterpiece, his own life its most beautiful poem.

<sup>1</sup> A letter from Ramakrishna's learned disciple, the author of *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* Mahendra Nath Gupta, has cleared up certain points with regard to this question.

Ramakrishna knew the great Vaishnavite poets but it appears that his knowledge was gleaned mainly from

in a lunatic asylum under a daily douche of psycho-therapy. Conscientiously day by day the flame would have been quenched. The magic lantern would have been no more! "The candle is dead." Sometimes the child also dies. Even in India where the centuries have seen a constant procession of such magic lanterns, anxiety was felt, and his father and mother, although accustomed to the visitation of Gods, regarded the child's transports with fear. But apart from these crises, he enjoyed perfect health and was not at all supernatural in spite of his many gifts. His ingenious fingers fashioned gods from clay, the heroic legends blossomed in his mind, he sang divinely the pastoral airs of Sri Krishna; and sometimes his precocious intellect took part in the discussions of learned men, whom he astonished as Jesus had astonished the Jewish doctors. But this boy with his clear skin, beautiful flowing locks, attractive smile, charming voice and independent spirit, who played truant from school and who lived as free as air, remained a child to the end of his life, like the little Mozart. Until he was thirteen he was adored and petted by the women and girls. They recognised in him something of their own femininity, for he had so far assimilated their nature that one of his childish dreams, cradled as he was in the legend of Krishna and the Gopis, was to be reborn as a little widow, a lover of Krishna, who would be visited by him in her home. This was but one of the innumerable incarnations he imagined.

Instinctively this Protean soul took on instantly each of the beings whom he saw or imagined. No man is entirely void of this magic plasticity. One of its inferior manifestations is that of a mimic, who copies attitudes and facial expressions, its highest (if such an expression may be used) is that of the God who plays for Himself the Comedy of the Universe. It is always the sign of art and of love. Thus was foreshadowed the marvellous power manifested later by Ramakrishna, a genius for espousing all the souls in the world.

\*

His father died when he was seven years old. The next few years were difficult ones for the family, for they had no resources. The eldest son, Râmkumâr,<sup>1</sup> went to Calcutta and opened a school there. He sent for his younger brother, now an adolescent, in 1852, but the latter, filled with the urge of his inner life and quite undisciplined, refused to learn.

At that time there was a rich woman, named Râni Râsmanî, belonging to an inferior caste. At Dakshineswar, on the eastern bank of the Ganges, some four miles from Calcutta, she founded a temple to the Great Goddess, the Divine Mother, Kâhî. She had considerable difficulty in finding a Brahmin to serve as its priest. Strangely enough religious India with its veneration for monks, Sâdhus, and seers, has little respect for the paid office of priest. The temples are not, as in Europe, the body and the heart of God, the

<sup>1</sup> Ramakrishna was the fourth of five children.



THE young priest of Kâli was twenty years old. He did not know what a terrible mistress he had elected to serve. As a purring tigress that fascinates her prey, She was to feed upon him, playing with him for ten long enchanted years passed beneath Her gleaming pupils. He lived in the temple alone with Her, but at the centre of a whirling cyclone. For the burning breath of a crowd of visionaries blew like the monsoon its eddies of dust through the door of the temple. Thither came countless pilgrims, monks, Sâdhus, fakirs, Hindus and Mussulmans—a congregation of the madmen of God.<sup>1</sup>

The temple was a vast building with five domes crowned with spires. It was reached by an open terrace above the Ganges between a double row of twelve small domed temples to Shiva. On the

at rectangular paved court

'Krishna and Râdhâ arose'

'symbolic world




was represented—the Trinity of the Nature Mother (Kālī), the Absolute (Shiva), and Love (Rādhā-kānta. Krishna, Rādhā), the Arch spanning heaven and earth. But Kālī was the sovereign deity

Within the temple She dwelt, a basalt figure, dressed in sumptuous Benares tissue, the Queen of the world and of the Gods. She was dancing upon the outstretched body of Shiva. In Her two arms on the left She held a sword and a severed head, on the right She offered gifts and beckoned. "Come! Fear not! . . ." She was Nature, the destroyer and the creator. Nay, She was something greater still for those who had ears to hear. She was the Universal Mother, "my Mother, the all-powerful, who reveals Herself to Her children under different aspects and Divine Incarnations," the visible God, who leads the elect to the invisible God, "and if it so please Her, She takes away the last trace of the ego from all created beings and absorbs it into the consciousness of the Absolute, the undifferentiated God. By Her grace the finite ego loses itself in the illimitable Ego—Atman—Brahman."

series of the twelve temples of Shiva, has a semi-circular verandah, its roof supported by columns, looking on to the Ganges on the west. A great hall for music and sacred representations opened onto the great court. On either side there were guest rooms, with kitchens for visitors and for the Gods. To the west lay a beautiful shady garden and two ponds on the north and the east. It was carefully cultivated and full of flowers and scents. Beyond the garden can be seen the group of five sacred trees planted at the desire of Ramakrishna. They became famous under the name of the Panchavati. There he spent his days in meditation and prayer to the Mother. Below murmured the Ganges.

figure with a fixed smile, whose look consisted of  
litature. She lived, breathed, arose from Her  
couch, ate, walked, lay down again. The service  
of the temple docilely followed the rhythm of Her  
days. Every morning at dawn the peals of little  
bells chimed, the lights were swung. In the music  
room the flutes played the sacred hymn to the  
accompaniment of drums and cymbals. The  
Mother awoke. From the garden, embowered in  
jasmine and roses, garlands were gathered for  
Her adornment. At nine in the morning music  
summoned to worship and to it came the Mother.  
At noon She was escorted to rest on Her silver  
bed during the heat of the day to the strains of  
more music.<sup>1</sup> It greeted Her at six in the even-  
ing when She reappeared. It played again to  
the accompaniment of brandished torches at sun-  
down for evening worship; and conches sounded  
and little bells tinkled ceaselessly, until finally at  
nine in the evening it heralded the hour for repose  
when the Mother slept.

And the priest was associated with all the inti-  
mate acts of the day. He dressed and undressed  
Her, he offered Her flowers and food. He was  
one of the attendants when the Queen arose and  
went to bed. How could his hands, his eyes, his  
heart be otherwise than gradually impregnated  
with Her flesh? The very first touch left the  
sting of Kâli in his fingers and united them for  
ever.

... .. north-west corner of 

Xogin, whose path traverses the very edge of the

him with her love, the Vasp had consoled her-  
self in her stone sheath, and all his efforts failed  
to bring her to live again. Passion for the dumb  
Goddess consumed him. To touch her, to  
embrace her, to win one sign of life from her,  
one look, one sigh, one smile, became the sole  
object of his existence. He hung himself down  
in the wild jungle-like part of the garden, medi-  
tating and praying. He tore off all his clothes,  
even to the sacred cord, which no Brahmin ever  
lays aside; but love for the Mother had revealed  
to him that no man can contemplate God unless  
he has shed all his prejudices. Like a lost child  
in tears he besought the Mother to show Himself  
to him. Every day spent in vain effort increased  
his distraction, and he lost all control over him-  
self. In despair he writhed on the ground in  
front of visitors, and became an object of pity, of  
mockery, even of scandal; but he cared for none  
of these things. Only one thing mattered. He  
knew that he was on the verge of extreme happi-  
ness—nothing but a thin partition, which he was,  
nevertheless, powerless to break down, separated  
him from it. He knew nothing of the science of  
directed ecstasy, as minutely noted and codified  
by religious India for centuries past with all the  
minutiae of a double Faculty of Medicine and

those days of bewilderment as having face  
breast reddened by the afflux of blood, his  
filled with tears and his body shaken with spasm.  
He was at the limit of physical endurance. When  
such a point has been reached, there is not  
but descent into the darkness of apoplexy-  
vision.

The partition was suddenly removed and  
saw<sup>1</sup>

Let him speak for himself<sup>1</sup> His voice rang  
our ears with the accents of our own "madmen  
God," our great seers of Europe

"One day I was torn with intolerable anguish.  
My heart seemed to be wrung as a damp cloth  
might be wrung. . . . I was racked with  
pain. A terrible frenzy seized me at the thought  
that I might never be granted the blessing of the  
Divine vision. I thought if that were so, that was  
enough of this life! A sword was hanging in the  
sanctuary of Kâh. My eyes fell upon it and a  
idea flashed through my brain like a flash of  
lightning. 'The sword! It will help me to conquer  
it.' I rushed up to it, and seized it like a mad  
man . . . . . And lo! the whole scene, doors,  
windows, the temple itself vanished . . . I  
seemed as if nothing existed any more. Instead  
I saw an ocean of the Spirit, boundless, dazzling  
In whatever direction I turned great luminous  
waves were rising. They bore down upon me  
with a loud roar, as if to swallow me up. In an

1. The description I have used three separate accounts  
by, all tell the same

consciousness' and I tell . . . How I passed that day and the next I know not. Round me rolled an ocean of ineffable joy. And in the depths of my being I was conscious of the presence of the Divine Mother."

It is noticeable that in this beautiful description there is no mention of the Divine Mother until the end; She was merged in the Ocean. The disciples who afterwards quoted his exact words, asked him whether he had really seen the Divine form. "He did not say, but on coming to himself from his ecstasy he murmured in a plaintive tone, 'Mother' . . . Mother!"

My own view, if I may be pardoned the presumption, is that he saw nothing, but that he was aware of Her all-pervading presence. He called the Ocean by Her name. His experience was like a dream, to give a lesser example, where-in without the slightest feeling of incongruity, the mind attaches the name of the being filling its thoughts to quite a different form, the object of our love is in everything; all forms are but its cloak. On the shores of that sea which rolled down upon Namakrishna, I see immediately the

'The exact text reads "I lost all natural consciousness" This detail is important, for the rest of the story shows that a higher consciousness, that of the inner world, was on the other hand most keenly perceptive. 'Sri Rameshvarnam, the Great Master, Vol II, by Swami Satadananda, published by the Namakrishna Math of Myslapore, Madras, 1950. Satadananda, who died in 1927, was on terms of intimacy with Namakrishna and likewise possessed one of the loftiest religious and philosophical minds in India. His biography, unfortunately unfinished, is at once the most interesting and the most reliable

well engulged in the infinite until the scrupulous Christian faith and the stern admonitions of her watchful directors led her against her own inclinations to confine God within the form of Son of Man.'

But Ramakrishna the lover had not to struggle against the bent of his heart. On the contrary it led him from the formless to the form of Beloved. He wished it so, for once he had seen and possessed it for an instant, he could not live without it. From that day onward he would have ceased to exist if he had not constantly renewed the fiery vision. Without it the world was dead, and living men as nothing but vapour shadows, painted figures upon a screen.

.....

Further, the ecstasy in Ramakrishna's case followed the normal course of such revelations, as was only natural. Cf. the full collection of documents, gathered together by Starbuck under the title *The Psychology of Religion*.

.....

over me, I shall die if these waves continue to pass over me.' I said, 'Lord, I cannot bear any more;' yet I had no fear of death."

..... also the magnificent account of the great mystic

But nobody faces the immutable with impunity. The shock of the first encounter was so violent that his whole being remained in a shuddering state. He only saw those around him through a veil of drifting mist, of dissolving waves of silver shot with sparks of fire. He could no longer control his eyes, his body, or his mind; another will guided them, and he passed through some terrible hours. He prayed the Mother to come to his aid. Then suddenly he understood. He was possessed by the Mother. He ceased to resist. "Piet voluntas tua" . . . She filled him. And out of the mists little by little the material form of the Goddess emerged, first a hand, then Her breath, Her voice, finally Her whole person. Here is one of the marvellous visions of the poet, among a hundred others:

It was evening. The rites were over for the day. The Mother was supposed to be asleep, and he had returned to his room outside the temple above the Ganges. But he could not sleep. He

He, and gradually the behavior of his mother & became outwardly manifest. Other people were learning what he saw. Through his bed through a window appeared the bodies of Gaudi Mathur Babu, the son-in-law of foundress of the temple and the master of place, was sitting one day in his room opposite Ramakrishna's. Unobserved he watched pacing up and down upon his balcony. Suddenly he uttered a cry, for he saw him alternately the form of Shiva as he walked in one direction and of the Mother as he turned and walked in the opposite direction.

To most people his madness of love was a shocking scandal. He was no longer capable of performing the temple rites. In the midst of ritual acts he was seized with fits of unconsciousness, sudden collapses and petrifications, when he lost the control of the use of his joints and stiffened into a statue. At other times he permitted himself the strangest familiarities with the Goddess. His functions remained in a state of suspension. He never closed his eyes. He no longer ate. His nephew who was present had not looked after his most pressing needs, he would have died. Such a condition brought those evils in its train.

<sup>1</sup> He no longer showed any consideration for his patrons whose exemplary fidelity consistently defended him against all attack. One day when the rich devotee, the foundress, Rani Rasmani, was praying with her mind elsewhere, Ramakrishna discerned the frivolous objects passing through her thoughts and publicly rebuked her. Those present were greatly excited, but Rasmani herself remained calm. She nobly considered that it was the Mother who had rebuked her.



from which our Western visionaries have also suffered. Minute drops of blood gazed through his skin. His whole body seemed on fire. His spurt was a furnace whose leaping flames were the Gods. After a period when he saw the Gods in the persons about him (in a prostitute he saw Sita, in a young Englishman standing upright cross-legged against a tree, he saw Krishna), he became the God himself. He was Kali, he was Rama, he was Radha, the lover of Krishna, he was Sita, he was the great monkey, Hanuman. Without insisting on detail, I have no intention of passing lightly over these deliriums of a soul with neither check nor pilot, given over to the furious waves of his passion, to the insatiable voracity of a wolf, ravaging for the Gods. Later they had their revenge and preyed upon him in their turn. I have no intention of deceiving my Western reader. He is at liberty, just as I was myself, to judge whether the madman of God

Later he was the Gopi (milkmaid), Krishna's lover, for six months.

The process of these realisations is interesting. It became the person of Rama by stages, through the people who served him, beginning with the hunter, Hanuman. Then in reward, as he himself believed, his appeared to him. This was his first complete vision with his eyes open. All his succeeding visions came by the same successive stages. First he saw the figures outside himself when they looked within himself; finally he became them himself. This student creative act is striking, but was natural to one of his astounding plastic genius. As soon as he visualised a thought, his vision became concrete. Imagine living within the innermost being of a Shakespeare while he was producing a play.

I will not deny the fact that when I had reached this point in my research, I shut up the book. Probably I should not have opened it again for a long time, if I had not known by certain indications what heights of wisdom he was to attain in the later years of his life.

ought to have been put in a strait jacket or not. We have good ground for such an opinion, for even in India men of the greatest sanctity held that view when they saw him. At the time he submitted patiently to be examined by doctors and followed their vain prescriptions, and later, when he looked back over the past and sounded the depths of the abyss from which he had escaped, he himself could not understand why his reason, and even life itself, had not foundered.

But the extraordinary thing for us, and the only thing that matters, is that, instead of foundering they rounded the Cape of Storms victoriously. Nay, this period of hallucination appears to have been a necessary stage, whence his spirit was to rise in the fullness of joyous and harmonious power to mighty realisations for the benefit of humanity. Here is a subject of research tempting to great physicians both of the body and of the mind. There is no difficulty in proving the apparent destruction of his whole mental structure, and the disintegration of its elements. But how were they reassembled into a synthetic entity of the highest order? How was this ruined building restored to a still greater edifice and by nothing but will-power? As we shall see by the sequel, Ramakrishna became master alike of his madness and of his reason, of Gods and of men. At times he would open the flood-gates of the deeps of his soul, at others he would conduct with his disciples smiling dialogues, in the manner of a modern Socrates, full of ironic wisdom and penetrating good sense.

But in 1838, at the time of the facts related

here, Bhaskarshana had not yet achieved the master. He had still a long way to go. And if I have anticipated somewhat the end of his life, I have done so to warn the European reader against his last judgment, which was also my own. Patience! The ways of the spirit are discourteous. Let us await the end!

In truth at this period the tramp of God went about like a blind man with closed eyes and without a guide. Instead of keeping to the path, he forced his way through the barriers of the hedges and fell into the ditches. Nevertheless he advanced; each time that he fell he picked himself up again and went on his way.

Do not imagine that he was proud or obstinate. He was the most humble of men. If you had told him that his condition was a disease, he would have asked you to prescribe a remedy, and he would not have refused to try any cure.

For a time he was sent back to his home at Kamarpukur. His mother wished him to be married, hoping that marriage would cure him of his divine enchantment. He made no demur; indeed, he showed an innocent pleasure at the thought. But what a strange marriage it was, not much more real (less real, indeed, in spirit) than his union with the Goddess! His bride (1850) was a child of five years old. I feel, as I write, what a shock this will be to my Western reader. I do not wish to spare him. Child-marriage is an Indian custom, and one which has most often roused the indignation of Europe and America. The virtuous Miss Mayo has recently

raised its flag, though rather a tattered one; for the best minds of India, the Brâhmo Samâj, Tagore, Gandhi,<sup>1</sup> have for long condemned the practice, although it is usually more a formality than a reality—child-marriage being generally nothing more than a simple religious ceremony, akin to a Western betrothal, remaining unconsummated until after puberty. In the case of Ramakrishna, making it doubly revolting in the eyes of Miss Mayo, the union was between a little girl of five and a man of twenty-three. But peace to scandalised minds! It was a union of souls and remained unconsummated—a Christian marriage so-called in the days of the Early Church—and later it became a beautiful thing. A tree must be judged by its fruits, and in this case the fruits were of God, pure and not carnal love. Little Sâradâmani<sup>2</sup> was to become the chaste sister of a big friend who venerated her as an immaculate companion of his trials and of his faith, the firm and serene soul, whom the disciples associated with his sanctity as the *Holy Mother*.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Gandhi, who knows too much about child marriage for he was one of those children who has kept throughout his life the burning confusion of his precocious experiences, particularly virulent against this abuse. Nevertheless he recognises that in exceptional cases among chosen souls, who are loyal and religious, a mutual engagement dating from infancy may have very pure and beneficial results, removes all other temptations common to the unhealthy occupations of adolescence, and it gives to the union a quality of holy comradeship. It is well-known what an admirable companion the little child, whose fate was joined to his, has been for Gandhi during the difficult course of his life.

<sup>2</sup> Her family name was Mukhopadhyâya. Afterwards she

For the time being the little girl returned according to custom to the house of her parents after the ceremony of marriage had been performed, and did not see her husband again for the long period of eight or nine years, while her husband, who seemed to have regarded some measure of calm at his mother's house, returned to his temple.

But Kali was waiting for him. Hardly had he crossed the threshold than divine delirium in its most violent form was rekindled. Like Hercules in a Nessus shirt, he was a living funeral pyre. The legion of Gods swooped upon him like a whirlwind. He was torn in pieces. He was divided against himself. His madness returned tenfold. He saw demonic creatures emerging from him, first a black figure representing sin, then a Sanyāsīn, who slew sin like an archangel. (Are we in India or a thousand years ago in some Christian monastery of the West?) He remained motionless, watching these manifestations issue from him. Horror paralysed his limbs. Once again for long periods at a time his eyes refused to close. He felt madness approaching, and terrified, he appealed to the Mother. The vision of Kali was his only hope of survival. Two years went by in this orgy of mental intoxication and despair.

At length help came.

always had this exquisite custom of giving the name "Mother" to all womanhood, however much younger than himself.

'He claims for six years

'In 1861 his protectress, Kāmī Rāsamām, died. Fortunately her son-in-law, Mādhur Dabū, remained devoted to him

### III

## THE TWO GUIDES TO KNOWLEDGE: THE BHAIRAVI BRAHMANI AND TOTA PURI

Up to this point he had been swimming alone at the mercy of chance in an uncharted and boundless stream with its roaring rapids and whirlpools of the soul. He was on the verge of exhaustion, when two beings appeared on the scene, who held his head above water, and who taught him how to use its currents in order to cross the stream

The age-long history of the spirit of India is the history of a countless throng marching ever to the conquest of supreme Reality. All the great peoples of the world, wittingly, or unwittingly, have the same fundamental aim; they belong to the conquerors, who age by age go up to assault the Reality of which they form a part, and which lures them on to strive and climb, sometimes they fall out exhausted, then with recovered breath they mount undaunted until they have conquered or been overcome. But each one does not see the same face of Reality. It is like a great fortified city, beleaguered on different sides by different armies, who are not in alliance. Each army has its own tactics and weapons to solve its own problems of attack and assault. Our Western races' storm the bastions, the outer

1 To order to explain my meaning I am obliged to use the West and East. But I hope that wise

works. They desire to overcome the physical forces of Nature, to make her laws their own, so that they may construct weapons therefrom for gaining the inner citadel, and forcing the whole fortress to capitulate.

India proceeds along different lines. She goes straight to the centre, to the Commander-in-Chief of the uneven General Headquarters, for the Reality she seeks is transcendental. But let us be careful not to put Western "realism" in opposition to Indian "idealism." Both are "realisms." Indians are essentially realists in that they are not easily contented with abstractions, and that they attain their ideal by the self-chosen means of enjoyment and sensual possession. They must see, hear, taste and touch ideas. Both in sensual richness and in their extraordinary imaginative power they are far in advance of the West. How then can we reject their evidence in the name of Western reason? Reason, in our eyes, is an impersonal and objective path open to all men. But is reason really objective? To what degree is it true in particular instances? readers will distinguish, as I do, many divisions of the West. For us the East in its ordinary sense means the Near East, the Semitic East, which in my sense of the word is further in spirit from India than some parts of the West. Slav, Germanic or Nordic. At this place in the story I am using the term *West* to indicate the march to the West of the great European races and those on the other side of the Atlantic, who have detached themselves from the common Indo-European stock.

I am far from denying to Indian thinkers a capacity for intellectual cooperation in the Absolute, but even the formless of the *Advaita Vedānta* is enshrouded to a certain extent by their burning intuition. Even if the *Formless* is without attributes and beyond reason, is it so certain that it is beyond some form of mystical contact? Is not revelation itself a kind of terrible contact?

Has it no personal limits? Again, has it been carefully noted that the "realizations" of the Hindu mind, which seem to us ultra-subjective, are nothing of the kind in India, where they are the logical result of scientific methods and of careful experiment, tested throughout the centuries and duly recorded? Each great religious visionary is able to show his disciples the way by which without a shadow of doubt they too may attain the same visions. Surely both methods, the Eastern and the Western, merit an almost equal measure of scientific doubt and provisional trust. To the truly scientific mind of to-day a widely generalized mistake, if it be sincere, is a relative truth. If the vision is false, the important thing to be discovered is wherein lies the fallacy, and then to allow its other premises to lead to the higher reality beyond it.

The common belief of India, whether clearly defined or vaguely felt, is that nothing exists save in and through the universal Spirit, the one and indivisible Brahman.<sup>1</sup> The diverse images of everything contained in the universe had their birth in Him, and the reality of the universe is derived from the same universal Spirit, whose conception it is. Individual spirits, we who form an

verse, know it. Until we have achieved knowledge of the one Brahman, we are bewildered by Mâyâ. Illusion,

<sup>1</sup> 'Everything is Brahman, all the various objects, both ~~.....~~ and reborn. Everything exists only in Brahman. ~~.....~~ "—Shastras



which has no beginning and is outside time; and so we take what is nothing but an incessant stream of passing images, springing from the invisible source, the One Reality,' to be the permanent reality.

Hence we must escape from the stream of illusion, rolling all round us, and like trout that leap over all barriers and scale waterfalls, we must go back to the source. Such is our unavoidable destiny, but it leads to salvation. Sadhana is the name given to this painful but heroic and magnificent struggle. The Sadhakas are they who wage it. Their small legion, renewed from age to age, is recruited from the fearless souls; for they have to submit to a system of application and rough discipline having the sanction of age-long experiment behind them. Two ways or weapons are open to them, both needing long application and constant practice. The first is the way of "Not this! Not this!"; which may be called the way of knowledge by radical negation, or the weapon of the Jnanin, the second is the way of "This! This!", which may be called the way of know-

I have taken this brief summary of thought from the masterly exposition of Swami Saradananda at the beginning of his *Sri Ramakrishna, the Great Master*. There are many others which I shall discuss in the second part of this work, when I study the philosophic and religious thought of Vivekananda. There I shall find room for a long exposition of the Yoga principle of India. 'Neli (Not that!) is the name given to Brahman Himself by the authors of the *Upanishads*. Cf. the work of the Christian mystic, St Denis the Areopagite. Treatise on *Mystic Theology*, Chapter V, where he says that the supreme author of intelligible things is absolute nothing that can be conceived by the understanding. There the master theologian collects on one page all the negatives in order to define God.

edge by progressive affirmation, or the weapon the Bhakti. The first relies solely on intellectual knowledge, and has always rejected everything, either real or apparent, outside it, proceeding with strained resolution and eyes fixed on the supreme goal. The second is the way of love. The love of the Well-Beloved (whose form varies as it becomes more pure) gradually leads to the renunciation of all else. The way of Jñāna is that of the absolute or impersonal God. The way of Bhakti is that of the personal God—at least its pilgrims hunger long on the way before finally rejoining the pilgrims of Jñāna.

The way of Bhakti was the way the blind instinct of Ramakrishna had unconsciously adopted from the first. But he knew nothing of its windings and lurking ambushes. It was true that a complete Itinerary from Paris to Jerusalem<sup>1</sup> existed, wherein the whole course from the starting point to the winning post was carefully mapped out, containing all the accidents of the way, the mountains and the gradients, the dangerous corners and the stopping places, carefully arranged in advance and wisely distributed. But the runner of Kamarpukur knew nothing of it. He went where his wild heart and his legs carried him; and at last, exhausted by his superhuman efforts, without guidance or assistance, maddened with solitude in the depths of the forest, he had moments when he gave himself up for lost. He had almost reached the last rough

<sup>1</sup> Allusion to the name of a famous book by Chateaubriand.

lung place, when help came to him through a

man.

One day from his terrace he was watching the  
boats with their multi-coloured sails darting to  
and fro upon the Ganges, when he saw one put  
at the foot of his terrace. A woman came up  
a few steps. She was tall and beautiful, with  
long unbound hair and wearing the saffron robe  
of a Sannyasin. She was between thirty-five and  
forty, but she looked younger. Ramakrishna was  
rueful with her appearance and sent for her.  
He came. As soon as she saw him, she burst  
into tears and said

"My son, I have been looking for you for a  
long time."

She was a Brahmin of a noble Bengal family,  
devotee of Vishnu, highly educated and very  
versed in holy texts, especially in the Bhakti

A Sannyasin, according to Max Müller's definition, is  
a person who has left everything and renounced all worldly  
care. The definition of the Bhagavad Gita is "One  
who neither hates nor loves anything." The lady in ques-  
tion had not yet attained this state of divine indifference,

Krishna and Rama (Cf. Barth op cit, p. 100 et seq.).  
Both these divinities appear in the name of the hero of  
this story, while he was himself reborn later in his life  
as a new incarnation, an Avatara, God and man.

Scriptures. She said she was looking for the man inspired by God, whose existence had been revealed to her by the Spirit, and that she had been entrusted with a message for him. Without further introduction and without even discovering her name (she was never known by any other than that of the Bhairavi Brâhmani, the Brahmin nun) the relations of mother and son were established there and then between the holy woman and the priest of Kâlî. Ramakrishna confided in her as a child might have done and told her all the tortured experiences of his life in God, of his Sâdhanâ; together with the misery of his bodily and mental sufferings. He told her that many thought him mad, and asked her humbly and anxiously whether they were right. The Bhairavi, having heard all his confessions, comforted him with maternal tenderness, and told him to have no fear, for he had certainly reached one of the highest states of the Sâdhanâ as described in the Bhakti texts by his own unguided efforts. His sufferings were simply the measure of his ascent. She looked after his bodily welfare and enlightened his mind. She made him in broad daylight go back over the road of knowledge, which he had already traversed alone and blindfold in the night. By instinct alone Ramakrishna had obtained in the course of several years "realisations" which mystic science had taken centuries to achieve, but he could not become truly their master until he had been shown the way whereby he had achieved them.

The Bhakta, whose knowledge is derived  
 The *vidyâ* begins by accepting one form of

God as his chosen ideal, as Rāmākrishna the Divine Mother. For a long time he is absorbed in this one love. At first he cannot attain the object of his devotion, but gradually he comes to see, touch and converse with it. From that moment the slightest concentration is enough to make him feel the living presence of his Lord. As he believes that his Lord is in everything, in all forms, he soon begins to perceive other forms of Gods emanating from his own Beloved. This divine polymorphism peoples his vision. Eventually he is so filled with its music that there is no room in him for anything else, and the material world disappears. This is called Savikalpa Samādhi—or state of super-conscious ecstasy, wherein the spirit still clings to the inner world of thought, and enjoys the sentiment of its own life with God. But when one idea has taken possession of the soul, all other ideas fade and die away, and his soul is very near its final end, the Nirvikalpa Samādhi—the final union with Brahman. It is not far to that cessation of thought wherein at last absolute Unity is realised by complete renunciation. Rāmākrishna had travelled

intense love we possess the joy of dying to ourselves and of bursting from our prison house, to be lost in the ocean of the Presence and in the burning darkness." III  
1, 2, and 4, and poem.

along three quarters of this spiritual pilgrimage as a blind man.' The Bhairavi, whom he adopted as his spiritual mother, as his Guru or teacher, showed him all its phases and their import. Having herself practised religious exercises, she was conversant with the roads of knowledge, and so she made him try all the roads of the Sâdhan in turn and methodically according to the rule of the Holy Books,—even the most dangerous ones, the Tantras, which expose the sense and spirit to all the disturbances of the flesh and the imagination, so that these may be overcome. But the path skirts the precipices of degradation and madness, and more than one who has ventured upon it has never returned. Ramakrishna the pure, however, came back as pure as he started out, and tempered as steel.

He was now in possession of all forms of union with God by love—"the nineteen attitudes," or different emotions of the soul in the presence of its Lord, such as the relations of a servant and his master, a son and his mother, a friend, a lover, a husband, etc. He had invested all sides of the Divine citadel; and the man who had conquered God partook of His nature.

His initiator recognised in him an Incarnation of the Divinity. She accordingly called a meeting at Dakshineswar and after learned discussion with the Pandits, the Bhairavi insisted that

had held him back on the last mile  
the cross-roads where man takes leave  
of God and of his love. His spiritual mother,  
had not try to urge him beyond them. They  
shrank from the blind vision, from the  
*Impersonal*.

the theological authorities should give public recognition to the new Avatāra.

Then his fame began to spread. People came from afar to see the wonderful man, who had succeeded, not only in one Sādhana, but in all

The ascetics, who by one road or another were straining towards God—monks, sages, Sādhus, visionaries—all came to seek his advice and to be instructed by him, who now sat at the cross-roads and dominated them. Their accounts speak of the fascination produced by the appearance of the man who had come back—not, as Dante, from Hell—but as a pearl-fisher from the deep sea—of the golden radiance of his body

burnt and purified so long in the fires of ecstasy.' But to the end of his life he remained the most simple of men without a trace of pride; for he was too intoxicated with God to consider himself, and was preoccupied much less with what he had already achieved than with what was still to do. He disliked all mention of his being an Avatāra, and when he had arrived at the point that everybody else, even the Bhairavi, his guide, took to be the summit, he looked up to the rest of the ascent, the last steep arête. And he was obliged to climb to the very top.

But for this last ascent the old guides were not sufficient. And so his spiritual mother, who had so many other mothers, the pain of seeing her

The Vedas of India constantly note this effect of the great crisis caused by an efflux of blood. As we shall see later, Hatakṛishna could tell as soon as he saw the breast of a religious man, whom he was visiting, whether or not he had passed through the fire of God.

son, once dependent on her milk, escape to follow a higher command from another's mouth with a sterner and more virile voice.

Towards the end of 1861 just at the moment when Ramakrishna had achieved his conquest of the personal God, the messenger of the impersonal God, ignorant as yet of his mission, arrived Dakshineswar. This was Totâ Purî (the palm man)—an extraordinary Vedântic ascetic, wandering monk, who had reached the ultimate revelation after forty years of preparation—liberated soul, whose impersonal gaze looked up at the phantom of this world with complete indifference.

For a long time Ramakrishna, not without anguish, had felt prowling round him the formless God and the inhuman, the superhuman indifference of His *Missa Dominici*—those Paramahansas from the rarefied heights, detached forever from all things, terrible ascetics denuded of body and spirit, despoiled of the heart's last treasure: the diamond of love of the Divine. During the early days of his stay at Dakshineswar he had felt the terrible fascination of these living corpses, and he had wept with terror at the idea that he too might have to come to a similar condition. Imagine what it must have cost a nature, such as I have described that of this madman of love, this born lover and artist. He needed to see, to touch, to consume the object of his love, and he remained unsatisfied until he



had embraced the living form, had bathed in it as in a river, and had espoused the divine mould and all its beauties. Such a man was to be forced to abandon the home of his heart and sink body and soul in the formless and the abstract. Such a train of thought must have been more painful and more alien to his nature than it would be to one of our Western scientists.

But he could not escape it. His very terror fascinated him like the eyes of a snake. Dizzy, though he was at the contemplation of the heights, he who had reached the peaks was obliged to go on to the very end. The explorer of the continent of the Gods could not stop until he had reached the source of the mysterious Nile.

I have said already that the formless God lay in wait for him with all His terror and attraction. But Rāmakrishna did not go to Him. Tota Pur came to fetch the lover of Kālī.

He saw him first without being seen as he was passing by, for he could not stay longer than three days in one place. Seated on one of the three young priests' was lost in a hidden vision. Tota Pur

I have already said with If you see the next stage

ocent simplicity tha

Ramakrishna, though  
 I was of a different order  
 and loved the sciences.  
 old.

made even the stern ascetic smile, replied he must first ask leave of the Mother. She gave Her permission, and he then put himself with humble and complete confidence in the guidance of his divine teacher.

But first he had to submit to the test "Initiation." The first condition was to renounce all his privileges and insignia, the sacred cord and the dignity of priest. These things were nothing to him, but he had also renounced his affections and the illusions which he had hitherto lived—the personal God, the entire harvest of the fruit of his love, sacrifice here and elsewhere, now and for ever. Naked as the earth he had symbolically to conduct his own funeral service. He had to burn the last remains of his ego—his heart. Then could he reclothe himself in the saffron robe of a Sannyâsin, the emblem of his new life. Then Puri now began to teach him the cardinal virtues of the Advaita Vedânta, 'the Brahman one and undifferentiated, and how to dive deep in sea-



self face to face with the Atman.' He replied severely: 'What! You say you cannot? You must!' Looking about him, he found a piece of glass. He took it and stuck the point between my eyes, saying: 'Concentrate your mind at that point.' Then I began to meditate with all my might, and as soon as the gracious form of the Divine Mother appeared, I used my discrimination as a sword,<sup>1</sup> and I clove Her in two. The last barrier fell and my spirit immediately precipitated itself beyond the plane of the 'conditioned,' and I lost myself in Samâdhi."

The door of the Inaccessible was only forced with great strain and infinite suffering. But hardly had Ramakrishna crossed the threshold than he attained the last stage—the Nirvikalpa Samâdhi—wherein subject and object alike disappeared.

"The Universe was extinguished. Space itself was no more. At first the shadows of ideas floated in the obscure depths of the mind. Monotonously a feeble consciousness of the Ego went on ticking. Then that stopped too. Nothing remained but Existence. The soul was lost in Self. Dualism was blotted out. Finite and Infinite space were as one. Beyond word, beyond thought, he attained Brahman."

In one day he had realised what it had taken Tota Puri forty years to attain. The ascetic was

<sup>1</sup> This is not a case of the clumsy auto-hypnotism of the hen, who falls into a catalepsy along a chalk line in the sun (thus I read the disastrous thought of my Western reader). The action of mind described by Ramakrishna was an effort of severe concentration, which excluded nothing, but which involved keen and critical analysis.

submitted to the yoke of Illusion without being aware of it? Illness too made his proud spirit realise its limitations. Several months in Bengal brought on a violent attack of dysentery. He ought to have gone away, but this would have been running away from evil and sorrow. He grew obstinate, "I will not give in to my body!" The trouble increased, and his spirit could no longer abstract itself. He submitted to treatment, but it was of no avail. The sickness grew more virulent with every dawn like a shadow gradually overcasting the day, and became so overwhelming that the ascetic could no longer concentrate his mind on Brahman. He was roused to fury by this evidence of decay, by his body, and went down to the Ganges to sacrifice it. But an invisible hand restrained him. When he had entered the stream he had no longer either the will or the power to drown himself. He came back utterly dismayed. He had experienced the power of *Māyā*. It existed everywhere, in life, in death, in the heart of pain, the Divine Mother! He passed the night alone in meditation. When morning dawned he was a changed man. He acknowledged before Ramakrishna that Brahman and Shakti<sup>2</sup> or *Māyā* are one and the same Being. The Divine Mother was appeased and delivered him from his illness. He bade farewell to the disciple who had become his master, and went on his way, an enlightened man.

<sup>2</sup> Shakti means Divine Energy, the radiance of Brahman. The departure of Tota Puri took place towards the end of 1865. It is possible that it was he, who gave to the son of Koudrem the famous name of Ramakrishna that



## IDENTITY WITH THE ABSOLUTE

### IV

This great thought was by no means new. The spirit of India had been nourished upon it for centuries and in their course it had been countlessly moulded, kneaded, and rolled out by Vedantic philosophy. It had been the subject of interminable discussions between the two great Vedantic schools, that of Sankara—the pure Advaita school—and of Ramanuja or Vishishtadvaita school (qualified monism). The first, the absolute non-Dualist, considers the Universe unreal and the Absolute the only reality, the second relatively non-Dualist, recognises Brahman as the only reality, but gives to the world of appearances, to individual souls, the value of upon during the torturing ascent. The crucial point had always been the definition of “phenomenal” Illusion, the essence of *Maya*. Was it to

Thus was forged a ladder of Nature Natures (Nature which creates nature), perpetually in motion and increasing in a latent power of ascending, wherein Max Müller and after him Vivekananda have recognised the origin of the doctrine of Evolution.





nibbled a few crumbs—that It was the sea at whose edge the salt doll leaned to measure the depth, but from the moment her foot touched the water, she melted, she was lost, she disappeared. "The unconditioned Being" is something that we cannot grasp. It eludes us, but that does not mean that we do not exist. It illumines our efforts, our ignorance, our wisdom, our good and our evil deeds, we nibble at Its outer shell, but there is a point of fusion when It takes us again into Its great mouth and absorbs us into Itself. But before the point of fusion is reached where was the salt doll? Where do the ants come from? In the case of the worker under the lamp, saintly hermit or forger, where is his home, where is the object he reads and his eyesight itself?

Ramakrishna tells us that even the inspired Holy Scriptures have all been more or less defiled because they have passed through human mouths. But is the defilement real? (For it presupposes the purity, the Brahman) Where do the lips and the mouth exist, which have eaten some portions of Divine food?

The "differentiated," although it is "without attachments," must then be some part of the "Undifferentiated," especially since "attachment" in the last resort,—"union between the

"Once upon a time there was a salt doll. She came down to the sea with the intention of measuring its depth, and she held a sounding rod in her hand. When she arrived at the edge of the water, she looked at the mighty ocean. Up to that point she had been a salt doll, but if she had taken one step forward, if she had put one foot into the sea, she would have become merged in the ocean. The salt doll would never have been able to come back to us to tell us the depth of the Ocean." (The Gospel of Ramakrishna)

Paul Deussen's I used the *Upanishads* and, to use Ramanujana's own words, "the real" and the *Valigala*.\*

In fact Ramanujana distinguishes two distinct planes and stages of vision that underlie the life of *Māyā*, which creates the reality of the "differentiated" universe, and the experience of perfect contemplation (*Samādhi*) wherein one makes contact with the Infinite is sufficient to make the illusion of all "differentiated" ego, our own and other men's, disappear immediately. But Ramanujana expressly maintains that it is absurd to pretend that the world is unreal so long as we form part of it, and receive from it for the maintenance of our own identity the unquestionable conviction (although hidden in our own interest of its reality). Even the saint who comes down from *Samādhi* (ecstasy) to the plane of ordinary life is forced to return to the envelope of his "differentiated" ego, however attenuated and purified. He is flung back into the world of relativity. "So far as his ego is relatively real to him, so far will this world also be real; but when his ego has been purified, he sees the whole world

\* It is to be noted in passing how the metaphysics of the Advaitic Absolute are akin to the doctrines of the pre-Socratician Greeks—to the doctrine of the "Indeterminate" of Anaximander, of course, for instance, which is "that which is not."

phenomena as the manifold manifestation of Absolute to the senses."

ya will then appear under its true colours, not truth and falsehood, knowledge and ignorance (Vidyā and Avidyā), everything that is to God, and everything that does not lead to Him. Therefore it is.

and his assertion has the personal value of a Thomas the Apostle who has both seen and heard, when he bears witness to these Vidyāns, men of super-knowledge who win the privilege of "realising" in this life the personal and personal God—for he was one himself

they have seen God both outwardly and inwardly. He has revealed Himself to them. The

God has told them. "I am the Absolute. I am the origin of 'differentiation'—the essence of Divine Energy radiating from Absolute they have perceived the very principle differentiating the supreme Atman and the universe, that which is alike in the Absolute

and in Māyā, Shakti, Prakriti, the future is no illusion. To the purified ego She is the manifestation of the supreme Atman, the

just sower of living souls and of the universe. From that moment everything became plain. The visionary hurried back from the gulf on fire

Th Brahman discovered with rapture that on will drink the Divine Mother, his Beloved, was the acting him. And he saw Her now with new eyes, for he had grasped Her deep significance,

and identity with the Absolute. She was the Absolute, manifesting Herself to men, the Im-

Undifferentiated and the differentiated,"—is, to use Ramakrishna's own words, "the real object of the Vedānta."

In fact Ramakrishna<sup>1</sup> distinguishes two distinct planes and stages of vision: that under the of Mâyâ, which creates the reality of the "differentiated" universe, and the supervision of perfect contemplation (Samādhi) wherein one in contact with the Infinite is sufficient to make Illusion of all "differentiated" egos, our own other men's, disappear immediately. But Ramakrishna expressly maintains that it is absurd to pretend that the world is unreal so long as it forms part of it, and receive from it for the maintenance of our own identity the unquenchable conviction (although hidden in our own lapses of its reality. Even the saint who comes down from Samādhi (ecstasy) to the plane of ordinary life is forced to return to the envelope of his "differentiated" ego, however attenuated and purified. He is flung back into the world of relativity. "So far as his ego is relatively real to him, so far will this world also be real; but when his ego has been purified, he sees the whole world

<sup>1</sup> It is to be noted in passing how the metaphysics of the Advaitic Absolute are akin to the doctrines of the pre-Socratic Greeks—in the doctrine of the "Indeterminate" of Anaximander of Ionia for instance, wherein he laid down that all things have been produced by separation from the One without Second of Xenophanes. Epicurus, who excludes all movement, all change, all multiplicity as nothing but Illusion. There be done before the unbroken chain of pioneers of Hellenic philosophy dashed.

the Interviews of 1892, when he life and which therefore contains

Brahman, who created differentiation. Good and bad works alike obey Me. The Law of Karma, in truth exists, but it is I, who am the Law-giver. It is I who make and unmake laws. I order all Karma, good and bad. Come to Me! Either through Love (Bhakti), through Knowledge (Jnana) or through Action (Karma), for all lead to God. I will lead you through this world, the Ocean of action. And if you wish it, I will give you the knowledge of the Absolute as well. You cannot escape from Me. Even those who have realised the Absolute in Samadhi return to Me at My will. My Divine Mother is the primordial Divine Energy. She is omnipresent. She is both the outside and the inside of visible phenomena. She is the parent of the world, and the world carries Her in its heart. She is the Spider and the world is the web She has spun. The Spider draws the thread out of Herself and then winds it round Herself. My Mother is at the same time the container and the contained. She is the shell, but She is also the kernel."

The elements of this ardent Credo are borrowed from the ancient sources of India. Ramakrishna and his followers never claimed that the thought was new. The Master's genius was of another

religious minds of modern India, and, I believe, of all other countries, have this in common, that their very power lies in the assurance that their truth is a very ancient and, an eternal verity, the Verity. Jagadda, the stern

personal made man—or rather Woman.<sup>1</sup> She is the source of all Incarnations, the Divine Intercessor between the Infinite and the finite.<sup>2</sup>

Then Ramakrishna intoned the Canticle of the Divine Mother

"Yea' My Divine Mother is none other than the Absolute. She is at the same time the One and the Many, and beyond the One and the Many. My Divine Mother says: 'I am the Mother of the Universe, I am the Brahman of the Vedānta, I am the Atman of the Upanishads. It is I,

<sup>1</sup> In India the personal God is conceived also as a female principle—Prakriti, Shakti.

<sup>2</sup> Compare the part of the Son in Christian mysticism—

"Effulgence of my glory, Son Beloved, (It is God who speaks)

Son, in whose face invisible is beheld

Visibly, what by Deity I am,

And in whose hand what by decree I do,

Second Omnipotence!

(Milton. *Paradise Lost*, VI, 680)

his might have been said by Ramakrishna with the exception perhaps of the word "Second," which makes the

reason subordinate to the Supreme Will creating it.

both of them are the same Omnipotence. The God

Milton, like the Brahman of Ramakrishna, being the

absolute, not manifest, could not act, He wished and it

the Son who was the Creator God, the acting God

was the Mother in the case of Ramakrishna. The

is the Word, He speaks, He does. He is born, He is

374.)

ble and

"The Filial Power arrived, for his is in all things—

With his great Father, and sat him down

Invisible, yet stayed (such privilege

Hath Omnipotence)

(*Paradise Lost*, VII, 386)

Denis Saurat. *Milton and Maternal Christianity* in

ad, 1923. The similarity of the mysticisms is obvious

natural. Both had their origin in the East, and both

from the same human brain with its limited operation.

imitable and yet harmonious. It is not confined within the form of any poetic measure, but it falls of itself into an ordered beauty and delight. Adoration of the Absolute is united without effort to the passionate love of Māyā. Let us keep in our ears its cry of love until we can measure its depth later by listening to Vivekananda. That great fighter, caught in the toils of Māyā, tried to break them, and he and she were constantly at war. Such a state was completely foreign to Rāmākrishna. He was at war with nothing. He loved his enemy as a lover, and nothing could resist his charm. His enemy ended by loving him. Māyā embodied him in Her arms. Their lips met. Armide had found her Renaud. The Cire who bewitched crowds of other suitors became for him the Ariadne who led Theseus by the hand through the mazes of the labyrinth. Illusion, the all-powerful, who hoods the eyes of the falcon, unhooded Rāmākrishna's and threw him from Her wrist into the wide regions of the air. Māyā is the Mother who reveals Herself to Her children through the various forms of Her splendour and by Divine Incarnations. With Her love, with the fire of Her heart She moulds the sheath of the ego so well that it becomes no more than "something that has length but no breadth."

"Allusion to the characters of Torquato Tasso's poem, *Jerusalem Unbound*  
 "Or the "eldest sister" Elzabeth Rāmākrishna said to Keshab Chunder Sen, "Māyā is created by the Divine Mother, as forming part of Her plan of the universe." The Mother plays with the world. The world is Her toy. "She lets slip the dying kine of the soul, held by the string of illusion" (October, 1882)

r. He roused from lethargy the Gods sl  
g in thought and made them incarnate.  
e the springs in the "sleeping wood"  
ed them with the heat of his magic person  
And so this ardent Credo is his own in  
t and its transport, in its rhythm an  
y, in its song of passionate love.  
en closely to it, for it is a magnificent son

of the Arya Samaj, was very angry if new ide  
tributed to him  
illusion to the title of the well-known fairy story  
Sleeping Beauty  
French title is *La Belle au Bois Dormant*, and  
translation is *the Beauty in the Sleeping Wood*  
(or)

but his mind <sup>song</sup> was also stored with the words  
recent poets and

Prasad that Ramakrishna owed some of his  
ing metaphors (that of the flying kite, for  
mentioned later) and some characteristic traits  
her (the mischievous twinkle in the corner of  
when she made use of illusion to bewilder the  
ed).

Other poet-murders mentioned in the Gospel  
names of Kamalākānta, a prodigy of the begin-  
nineteenth century, a devotee of the Mother;  
belonging to the same period, also a devotee  
her, a Bengal Vaishnavite saint of the same  
of popular songs; and among the more recent,  
real name was Trailokya Sannyāsi a disciple  
thor of songs, which often owed their inspira-  
improvements of Ramakrishna. And Gurub  
e, the great dramatist, who became Rama-  
ple, (swings from his plays, *Chandrapala*,  
etc.).



food of immortality in a Lord's Supper,' not with twelve apostles, but with all starving souls—with the universe.

After the departure of Tola Puri towards the end of 1863 Ramakrishna remained for more than six months within the magic circle, the circle of fire, and prolonged his identity with the Absolute until the limit of physical endurance had been reached. For six months, if such a statement is credible, he remained in a state of cataplectic ecstasy, recalling the description given of the lakhs of old—the body, deserted by the spirit like an empty house, given over to destructive forces. If it had not been for a nephew, who watched over the masterless body and nourished its forces, he would have died.' It was impossible to go

' Allowed to the Last Supper of Jesus Christ and his disciples.

moments of semi-consciousness the order of the Cosmic Spirit (or we may say) it the obscure recall and tyranny of the

western are both the infinite modes of the universe, is good in the world "at every moment of thy life, see and do And so it was during the descent from this long Sabbath that Ramakrishna came to "realize" his divine mission,

a line, a point, which melts under the magic fingers of this subtle refiner into Brahman.

So praised be the fingers and the water! Praised be the face and the veil! All things are God. God is in all things. He is in the shadow as well as in the light. Inspired by the English "Moralists" of the seventeenth century, Hugo said that the Sun is only the shadow of God. Ramakrishna would have said that the shadow is also light.

But it is because like all true Indian thinkers he believes in nothing that he has not first "realised" throughout his entire being, that his thought has the breath of life. The "conception" of the idea regains with him its plain and carnal meaning. To believe is to embrace, and after the embrace to treasure within oneself the ripening fruit.

When Ramakrishna has once known the grasp of such truths, they do not remain within him as ideas. They quicken into life; and fertilised by his Credo, they flourish and come to fruition in an orchard of "realisations," no longer abstract

Nirvikalpa Samādhi—the terrible door leading to the gulf of the Absolute—Kamākṛishna refused with anger, he, who never lost his temper and who was always careful not to hurt the feelings of his beloved son. "Shame on you!" he cried. "I thought you were to be the great banyan tree giving shelter to thousands of tired souls. Instead you are selfishly seeking your own well-being. Let these little things alone, my child. How can you be satisfied with so one-sided an ideal? You must be all-sided. Enjoy the Lord in all ways!" (By this he meant both in contemplation and in action, so that he might translate the highest knowledge into the highest service of mankind.)

Naren wept, humiliated and heart-broken with the duty of renunciation. He acknowledged that the Master's severity was just, but to the end of his life he carried a sick longing in his heart for the Abyssal God, although he devoted that life with humility, hardihood and courage to the service of man.

But we must remember that at the point we have reached in our story, Kamākṛishna had not

I shall never experience these ineffable joys again." Kṛishna maliciously let him alone to do as he pleased. Hriday was soon visited by frightful visions and was obliged to ask his uncle to deliver him.

The same experience befell the rich Mathur Babu. He longed for Kamākṛishna to procure the Samādhi for him. "Very well, so be it, my friend." As a result of the coveted Samādhi, Mathur Babu lost all interest and sense in business. This was more than he had bargained for, he became very anxious, and wished to go no further in the matter, so he besought Kamākṛishna to remove ecstasy from him for ever. Kamākṛishna smiled and cured him.

instruct, the extreme period of this  
trance which is likely to puzzle, nay,  
to my English readers, who are used  
to living on firm earth, and have not  
experienced the shocks of spiritual fires for a long  
time. Forgive me for a little while longer! We are  
down from the Mount of Sinai—down into

Namākrishna himself recognized afterward  
that he had been tempting Providence and that  
it was a miracle that he had ever returned. I  
was careful to warn his disciples against submitting  
to any such test. He even forbade it to Vinodā,  
his own daughter.

When young Naren (Viveka) importuned him to open to him the

way to a single day or suddenly, but gradually. It  
would be in the first half of 1866.

Much more than did he dissuade ordinary men  
from those whose bed in life is a narrow one, would  
be submerged by its torrents to their own hurt  
and that of the community. The way he cured his  
nephew, his young nephew, the faithful and matter-  
of-fact, and his rich patron, Mathur Babu, of their  
addiction to the forbidden fruits of ecstasy, shows a humour  
and sense worthy of Cervantes.

A good soul and devoted to his uncle but of the  
world, desired to share his uncle's fame. He thought  
it only right he ought to benefit from the spiritual  
of Namākrishna. He had no patience with the  
uninterestedness. In vain his uncle tried to dis-  
suade him from experimenting in ecstasy. The other  
was the result that his brain became completely  
deranged and he had attacks of convulsions and screams  
"father," cried Namākrishna, "dull the sense of  
Vinodā fell to the ground and overwhelmed  
with reproaches. "What have you done, uncle?"

The first path to be explored was the religion of Islam. He was hardly convalescent when he started out upon it at the end of 1866

From his temple he saw many Mussulman fakirs passing by; for the large-hearted patron of Dakshineswar, Rani Rasmani, a "nouvelle riche" of a low caste, in the breadth of her piety had desired rooms to be reserved in her foundation for passing guests of all religions. In this way Ramakrishna saw a humble Mussulman, Govinda Rai, absorbed in his prayers, and perceived through the outward shell of his prostrate body that this man through Islam had also "realised" God. He asked Govinda Rai to imitate him, and for several days the priest of Kali renounced and forgot his own Gods completely. He did not worship Them, he did not even think about Them. He lived outside the temple precincts, he repeated the name of Allah, he wore the robes of a Mussulman and was ready—imagine the sacrifice—to eat of forbidden food, even of the sacred animal, the cow! His master and patron, Mathur Babu, was horrified and begged him to desist. In secret he had food prepared for Ramakrishna by a Brahmin under the direction of a Mussulman in order to save him from delirium. The complete surrender of himself to another realm of thought resulted as always in the spiritual voyage of this passionate artist, in a vivid materialisation of the idea. A

## THE RETURN TO MAN

yet finished his *Lehrjahre*, his apprenticeship is also noteworthy that his life's experience won at his own risk and expense, and not common experience, as is partly at least the case with most of us.

His recovery was not due to his own merit or his own desire. He said that the Mother brought him to a sense of his human duties by physical suffering. He was gradually forced back from Nirvikalpa Samādhi by a violent attack of phthisis, which lasted for six months.

Both physical and moral suffering attached to the earth. A monk, who knew him, has said that during the first days of his return from ecstasy to the bosom of identity, he howled with pain when he saw two boatmen quarrelling violently. He came to identify himself with the sorrow of the whole world, however impure and murderous they might be, until his heart was scored with scars. But he knew that even the differences leading to strife among men are the daughters of the same Mother; that the "Omnipotent Differentiation" is the face of God Himself; that he must love God in all sorts and conditions of men, however antagonistic and hostile, and in all forms of thought controlling their existence and often setting them at variance the one with the other. Above all that he must love God in *all their Gods*.

In short he recognised that all religions lead by different paths to the same God. Hence he was eager to explore them all, for with him compre-

hension and action

time the inflowing was much more powerful than in the case of Islam. It covered his entire soul, breaking down all barriers. Hindu ideas were swept away. In terror Ramakrishna, struggling in the midst of the waves, cried out "Oh Mother, what are you doing? Help me!" It was in vain. The tidal race swept everything before it. The spirit of the Hindu was changed. He had no room for anything but Christ. For several days he was filled by Christian thought and Christian love.

ful large eyes, a serene regard and a fair skin. Although he did not know who it was, he succumbed to the charm of his unknown guest. He drew near and a voice sang in the depths of Ramakrishna's soul

"Behold the Christ, who shed his heart's blood for the redemption of the world, who suffered a sea of anguish for love of men. It is He, the master Yogi, who is in eternal union with God. It is Jesus, Love incarnate . . ."

The Son of Man embraced the seer of India, the son of the Mother, and became merged in him. Ramakrishna was lost in ecstasy. Once again he reached union with Brahman. Then gradually he came down to earth, but from that time he believed in the Divinity of Jesus Christ, the Incarnate God. But for him Christ was not the only Incarnation. Buddha and Krishna were there.

used the little very sparingly, however. He had reverence for *all* men, such as the Tibetan-

radiant personage with grave countenance and white beard appeared to him (thus he had probably visualised the Prophet). He drew near and lost himself in him. Ramakrishna realised the Mussulman God, "the Brahman with attributes." Thence he passed into the "Brahman without attributes". The river of Islam had led him back to the Ocean.

His expositors have later interpreted this experience, following as it did immediately upon his great ecstasy in the Absolute, in a very important sense for India, that Mussulmans and Hindus, her enemy sons, can only be reunited on the basis of the Advaita, the formless God. The Ramakrishna Mission has since raised a sanctuary to Him in the depths of the Himalayas, as the corner-stone of the immense and composite edifice of all religions.

Seven years later (I am grouping the facts for the sake of clearness) an experience of the same order led Ramakrishna to "realise" Christianity. Somewhere about November, 1874, a certain Taluk, a Hindu of Calcutta, with a garden near Dakshineswar, read the Bible to him. For the first time Ramakrishna met Christ. Shortly afterwards the word was made flesh. The life of Jesus secretly pervaded him. One day when he was sitting in the room of a friend, a rich Hindu, saw on the wall a picture representing the Madonna and Child. The figures became alive. When the expected came to pass according to the variable order of the spirit, the holy visions came close to him and entered into him so that his whole being was impregnated with them. Thus



of his Church. And to whom did the risen Christ first appear but to the repentant sinner, whose only claim to the privilege lay in the tears of love wherewith she had washed the feet of Christ and dried them with her hair?

Lastly, knowledge does not consist in the number of books a man has read. In Ramakrishna's India, as in the India of old, culture is largely transmitted orally, and Ramakrishna gained during the course of his life through intercourse with thousands of monks, pilgrims, pandits, and all sorts of men preoccupied with religious problems, and encyclopaedic knowledge of religion and religious philosophy,—a knowledge constantly deepened by meditation. "One day a disciple wondering at his knowledge asked him, 'How were you able to master all that knowledge?' And Ramakrishna answered: 'I have not read, I have heard the learned. I have made a garland of their knowledge wearing it round my neck, and I have given it as an offering at the feet of the Master.'"

He could say to his disciples, "I have practised all religions, Hinduism, Islam, Christianity, and I have also followed the paths of the different Hindu sects . . . I have found that it is the same God towards whom all are directing their steps, though along different paths.

"Mary Magdalene, Ramakrishna understood Sanskrit though he could not speak it. He said: 'In my childhood I would rather learn a few words of Sanskrit than of English. I would have liked to know Sanskrit but I could not.'"

At this point I can imagine our uncompromising Christians, who cherish the body of their God, raising their eyebrows haughtily, and saying:

"But what did he know of our God? This was a vision, a figment of the imagination. This was too easy, for he knew nothing of the doctrine."

He did in truth know very little, but he was a Bhakta, who believed through love. He did not claim to possess the knowledge of the Jñānis, who believe through the intellect. But when the bow is firmly held, does not each of the two arrows reach the same target? And do not both roads meet for the man who journeys to the very end? Vivekananda, Ramakrishna's great and learned disciple, said of him.

"Outwardly he was Bhakta but inwardly Jñāni."

At a certain pitch of intensity great love comprehends and great intellect forces the retreats of the heart. Moreover it is surely not for Christians to deny the power of love. It was love that made the humble fishermen of Galilee the chosen disciples of their God and the founders

Jains (the founders of the Jain religion), and the ten Sikh Gurus, but without believing that they were Incarna-

pictures was morning and Christians Christ and

it is quite thinker of

India, and deeply imbued with European thought than any of his contemporaries, Keshab Chunder Sen, had the noble humility to sit at the feet of the Bhakta, whose intuition of heart enlightened for him the spirit underlying the letter.

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"*What Verbalism.*  
 'Ramakrishna understood perfectly though he could not speak it. He said, 'In my childhood I could gather all that the Sadhus were reading in the house of a neighbouring family, even though it is true that the work of individual words escaped me. If a book is open in my hand I understand him, but I could not speak it myself.' (Geopel, II, 12)

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He resembles the Little Poor Man of Assisi in many ways, both moral and physical. He too was the tender brother of everything that lives and dies, and had drunk so deep of the milk of loving kindness that he could not be satisfied with a happiness he could not share with others. On the threshold of his deepest ecstasies he prayed to the Mother as She was drawing him to Himself.

"Oh Mother, let me remain in contact with men! Do not make me a dried up ascetic!"

And the Mother, as She threw him back to the shores of life from the depths of the Ocean, replied (half consciously he heard Her voice)

"Stay on the threshold of relative consciousness for the love of humanity."<sup>121</sup>

And so he returned to the world of men and his first experience was a bath of warm and simple humanity. In May, 1807, still much enfeebled by the crises he had passed through, he went to rest for six or seven months in his own country-side of Kamarpukur after an absence of eight years.<sup>122</sup> He gave himself up with the joy of a

From that time he resented all temptation to seek an

The Bhavani Brahmin accompanied him, but the experiences of the journey do not redound to her credit

in the atmosphere of his birthplace, monopolised by his

child to the familiar cordiality of the good people of the village, happy at the sight of their late Gadadhar, whose strange fame had reached them and made them rather anxious. And these simple peasants were nearer by their very simplicity to the profundity of his beliefs than the doctors of the towns and the devotees of the temples.

During this visit he learned to know his child wife Sarada Devi was now fourteen years old. She lived with her parents, but she came to Kamarpukur when she knew her husband had arrived. The spiritual development of the little wife with her pure heart was greater than her age, and she understood at once her husband's mission and the part of pious affection and tender disinterestedness she was to play in it. She recognised him as her guide and put herself at his service.

Ramakrishna has at times been blamed, and very coarsely blamed,<sup>1</sup> for having sacrificed her. She herself never showed any trace of it; she irradiated peace and serenity throughout her life on all who came in contact with her. Moreover there is a fact, which has never before been

revealed except by Vivekananda, that Ramakrishna himself was gravely aware of his responsibility and offered his wife the greatest sacrifice of which he was capable if she demanded it—his mission

"I have learnt," he said to her, "to look upon every woman as Mother. That is the only idea I can have about you. But if you wish to draw me into the world (of Illusion), as I have been married to you, I am at your service."

Here was something entirely new in the spirit of India. Hindu tradition lays down that a religious life *ipso facto* frees a man from every other obligation. Ramakrishna had more humanity and recognised that his wife had binding duty and recognised that his wife had binding rights over him. She was, however, magnanimous enough to renounce them, and encouraged him, in his mission. But Vivekananda specifically declares that it was "by consent of his wife" that he was free to follow the life of his choice. Touched by her innocence and self-sacrifice, Ramakrishna took upon himself the part of an elder brother. He devoted himself patiently during the months they were together to her education as a diligent wife and good manager. He had a great deal of practical common sense, curiously at variance with his mystic nature. The peasant's son had been brought up in a good school and no detail of domestic or rural life was alien to him. All who knew him remarked on the order and cleanliness of his house, in which respect the Little Poor Man of God might have

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old companions to whom she was a stranger, without ceremony. Moreover the presence of his young wife, humble and sweet though she was, troubled her and she had not the tact to hide it. After some painful scenes, which did not make her more amiable, she recognised her weakness. He begged Ramakrishna's pardon and left him for ever. He met her again for the last time in Benares, whither he had retired to spend the remainder of her days in a strict search for truth. She died shortly afterwards.

<sup>1</sup> This was especially the case from certain Brahmo Samajists, who were irritated by Ramakrishna's ascendancy over their leader, Keshab Chunder Sen, and they could not forgive him his wide popularity.



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taught his disciples, drawn though they were from the intellectual and upper middle classes.

He returned to Dakshineswar at the end of 1807, and in the course of the following year made several pilgrimages with Mathur Babu, his patron and the master of his temple. In the early months of 1808 he saw Shiva's city, Benares, and Allahabad at the sacred junction of the Ganges and the Jumna, and Brindaban, the very home of legend and of the Song of Songs, the scene of the *Romancero* pastoral of Krishna. His transports, his intoxication may be imagined. When he crossed the Ganges before Benares, "the city of God" seemed to him not built of stone, but like a heavenly Jerusalem, "a condensed mass of spirituality." On the cremating fields of the holy city he saw Shiva with His white body and tawny matted locks and the Divine Mother bending over the funeral pyres and granting salvation unto the dead. When twilight fell on the banks of the Jumna, he met the herdsmen leading their cattle home, and he was carried away with emotion, and ran shouting "Krishna! Where is Krishna?"

But if he did not see the God Himself, he met something else in the course of his travels of greater importance and deeper meaning for us of the West—he discovered the face of human suffering. Up to that time he had lived in a state of ecstatic hypnosis within the gilded shell of his sanctuary, and the hair of Kâh had hidden it from him. When he arrived at Deoghar with his rich companion, he saw its almost naked inhabitants, the Santhals, emaciated and dying of

hunger for a terrible famine was ravaging the land. He told Mathur Babu that he must feed these unfortunates. Mathur Babu objected that he was not rich enough to support the misery of the whole world. Ramakrishna thereupon sat down among the poor creatures and wept, declaring that he would not move from thence, but would share their fate. Croesus was obliged to submit and to do the will of his poor priest.

During the summer of 1870 Mathur made the mistake of taking him in the course of another journey to one of his estates at the time of the payment of dues. The harvests had failed for two years running and the tenants were reduced to extreme misery. Ramakrishna told Mathur to remand their dues, to distribute help to them and to give them a sumptuous feast. Mathur Babu protested but Ramakrishna was inexorable.

"You are only the steward of the Mother," he said to the rich proprietor "They are the Mother's tenants. You must spend the Mother's money. When they are suffering, how can you refuse to help them? You must do so."

Mathur Babu had to give in. These things should not be allowed to fall into oblivion. Swami Shivananda, the present head of the Ramakrishna Order (the Ramakrishna Math and Mission), one of the first apostles and a direct disciple of the Master, has described the following scene, which he saw with his own eyes. One day at Dakshineswar, while he was in a condition of super-consciousness, Ramakrishna said.

"I have heard a great saying to-day. I will proclaim the living truth to the world."

regarded as God!"

Vivekananda was present. When he heard those pregnant words, he said to Shivananda:

"I have heard a great saying to-day. I will proclaim the living truth to the world."

And Swami Shivananda added:

"If anyone asks for the foundation of the innumerable acts of service done by the Ramakrishna Mission since then, he will find it there."

About this time several deaths left the mark of sorrow's cruel yet brotherly fingers upon Ramakrishna. Though a man lost in God, who regarded departure from this life as a return to endless bliss, he was seen on the occasion of the death of a young friend and nephew to laugh for joy and sing his deliverance. But the day after his death he was suddenly assailed by the most terrible anguish. His heart was broken, he could hardly breathe and he thought:

"Oh God! Oh God! If it is thus with me,

On another occasion he said: "God is in all men, but men are not in God; that is the reason why they suffer." (See *Ramakrishna's Teachings*, I, 297)

Ramakrishna set the example of the most humble service. He, a Brahmin, went to a pariah's house and asked permission to clean it. The pariah, overcome by the proposal, a criminal one in the eyes of an orthodox Hindu, which might have exposed his visitor and himself to the worst reprisals, refused to allow it. So Ramakrishna went to the house at night when all were asleep and wiped

how they must suffer, those who lose their loved ones, their children?"

And the Mother bestowed upon him the duty and the power of administering the balm of faith

to mourners.

"Those who did not see it," Swami Shiva-

nanda wrote to me, "cannot imagine to what an

extent this man, so detached from the world, was

constantly occupied in listening to the story of

their worldly tribulations, poured out to him by

men and women alike, and in lightening their

burdens. We saw innumerable examples of it,

and there may be some householders still living,

who call down blessings upon him for his infinite

pity and his ardent attempts to relieve the suffer-

ings of men. One day in 1883 Mani Mallik, a

rich and distinguished old man, lost his son and

came to Ramakrishna with a broken heart. He

entered so deeply into the old man's sorrow that

it almost seemed as if he were the bereaved father,

and his sorrow surpassed Mallik's. Some time

passed thus. Suddenly Ramakrishna began to

sing."

funeral oration. He

of the fight of the

invaders

to the

quiver

and

name of the

the Gospel of Sri

means unique

"And," concluded Shivananda, "I remember how the father's grief was assuaged by it. This song gave him back his courage, calmed his sorrow and brought him peace."

As I describe this scene my thoughts go back to our own Beethoven, who without saying a word came and sat down at the piano and consoled a bereaved mother with his song.

This divine communion with living, loving, suffering, humanity was to be expressed in a passionate, but pure and pious symbol. When in 1872 his wife came to him at Dakshineswar for the first time,<sup>1</sup> the tenderness of Ramakrishna, a tenderness compounded of religious respect purged of all trace of desire and sensual disturbance, recognised the Goddess under her veil, and he

Ragnakrishna consoled more than one mourner with more than one song. But its heroic character always remained.

... with energetic gestures and radiant face. Then he became normal again and talked affectionately to the unhappy man and consoled him.

D G Mukerji also describes the same scene as Swami Shivananda and with his usual art. But he was not an ascetic, while Shivananda and the author of the Gospel

made a solemn avowal of it. One night in May, when everything had been prepared for worship, he made Sarada Devi sit in the seat of Kâli, and as priest he accomplished the ritual ceremonies, the Shorthashî Pujâ, the adoration of womanhood. Both of them were in a condition of semi-conscious or super-conscious ecstasy. When he came to himself he hailed his companion as the Divine Mother. In his eyes She was incarnate in the living symbol of immaculate humanity.

His conception of God, then, was one which grew by degrees, from the idea of the God who is omnipresent and in whom everything is absorbed, like a sun fusing everything in itself, to the warm feeling that all things are God, like so many little suns, in each of which He is present and active. Both, it is true, contain the same idea, but the second reverses the first, so that not only from the highest to the lowest, but from the lowest to the highest, there is a twofold chain joining without a break the one Being to all living beings. Thus man becomes sacred.

Two years before his death, April 5, 1884, he said.

"I can now realise the change that has taken place in me. A long time ago Vaishnav Charan

Mother, in one form Thou art in the street and in another form Thou art the universe. I salute Thee, Mother I salute Thee" (The Master)





eminent men of Bengal had made him aware of the inadequacy of their knowledge and of the great starving void awaiting him in the soul of India. He never ceased to make use of all the sources within his reach for adding to his knowledge, from the religious or the learned, from the poor or the rich, from wandering pilgrims or pillars of science and society. Personal pride was quite alien to him; he was instead rather inclined to think that each "seeker after truth" had received some special enlightenment, which he himself had missed, and he was anxious to pick up the crumbs that fell from their table. He therefore sought them out wherever they might be found without considering how he might be received.

note date The authorized biographer of Ramakrishna, N (Mahendra Nath Gupta), writes it to 1863 on the ground that Ramakrishna gave it to be understood that in the course of this visit he saw Kashab Chandra Sen officiating in the pulpit of the Saraj from 1862 to 1863; and there are several reasons why Ramakrishna could not have made the journey in 1864-5. At all events it was in



## VI

### THE BUILDERS OF UNITY

**RAJ MOHUN ROY, DEVENDRANATH TAGORE,**  
**KESHAU CHUNDER SEN, DAYANANDA**

**RAJ MOHUN ROY**, an extraordinary man who ushered in a new era in the spiritual history of the ancient continent, was the first really cosmopolitan type in India. During his life of less than sixty years (1774-1833) he assimilated all kinds of thought from the Himalayan myths of ancient Asia to the scientific reason of modern Europe. He belonged to a great aristocratic Bengal family, bearing the hereditary title of Roy, and he was brought up at the court of the Great

For the life and works of this great forerunner, see *Raja Raj Mohun Roy, His Writings and Speeches*, 1923, Katesan, Madras, whose interest is marred by chronological inaccuracies, and the excellent pamphlet of *Ramanda Chatterjee* *Raja Mohun Roy and Modern India*, 1918, The Modern Review Office, Calcutta. These works, in part on the biography written by Collett, who knew him personally.



o last as long as life itself, against idolatry. He published a book in Persian with a preface in Arabic attacking orthodox Hinduism. His outraged father thereupon drove him from home. For four years he travelled in the interior of India and Thibet, studying Buddhism without growing to love it, and risking death from Lamaist fanaticism. At the age of twenty the prodigal son was recalled by his father and returned home. In a vain attempt to attach him to the world he was married, but no cage could contain such a bird.

When he was twenty-four he began to learn English, as well as Hebrew, Greek and Latin. He made the acquaintance of Europeans and learnt their laws and their forms of government. As a result he suddenly cast aside his prejudice against the English and made common cause with them. In the higher interests of his people he won their confidence and took them as allies. He had discovered that only by depending on Europe could he hope to struggle for the regeneration of India. Once more he began his violent polemics against barbarous customs such as Sati, the burning of widows. This raised a storm of opposition culminating in his definite expulsion from his family in 1799 at the instance of the Brahmins. A few years later even his mother and his wives, his nearest and dearest, refused to live with him. He spent a dozen hard and courageous years,

'It is said that in 1811 he was present at the burning of a young sister-in-law, and that the horror of the sacrifice, heightened by the struggles of the widow, upset him completely, so that he had no peace until he freed the land from such crimes.



by one of his European friends, the Protestant minister, Adam, who secretly flattered himself that he had converted Roy to Christianity, so that he might become its great apostle to the Indians. But Roy was no more to be chained to orthodox Christianity than to orthodox Hinduism, although he believed that he had discovered its real meaning. He remained an independent theist, essentially a rationalist and moralist. He extracted from Christianity its ethical system, but he rejected the Divinity of Christ, just as he rejected the Hindu Incarnations. As a passionate Unitarian he attacked the Trinity no less than polytheism; hence both Brahmins and missionaries were united in enmity against him.

But he was not the man to be troubled on that account. As all other churches were closed to him, he opened one for himself and for the free believers of the universe. It was preceded by the founding of the Atmeya Sabha (the Society of Friends) in 1815 for the worship of God, the One and Invisible. In 1827 he had published a pamphlet on the Gayatri, supposed to be the most ancient theistic formula of the Hindus. Eventually in 1828 his chief friends, among whom was Tagore, gathered at his house and founded a Unitarian Association, destined subsequently to have a startling career in India, under the name of the Brahmo Samaj, (Adi Brahmo Samaj) the Church, which was not in a prosperous condition. The name of Brahmo Samaj appears erroneously for the first time in the deed of purchase of land whereon the Unitarian temple was built in 1829. Its first meeting was held on August 25, 1828. Every Saturday from seven to nine recitations of the Vedas.

House of God. It was dedicated to the "worship and adoration of the Eternal, Unsearchable, Immutable Being, who is the Author and server of the Universe." He was to be shipped "not under or by any other name, & nation or title peculiarly used for and applied to any particular Being or Beings by any mass of men whatever." The church was to be closed to none. Ram Mohun Roy wished the Brahmo Samaj should be a universal house of prayer, open to all men without distinction of colour, caste, nation or religion. In the deed he laid down that no religion "shall be reviled or slightly or contemptuously spoken of or alluded to." The cult was to encourage "the promotion of the contemplation of the Author and Preserver of the Universe" and "of charity, morality, piety, benevolence, virtue and strengthening the bonds of union between men of all religious persuasions and creeds."

Roy then wished to found a universal religion and his disciples and admirers voluntarily called it "Universalism." But I cannot accept the term in its full and literal meaning; for it excluded from it all forms of polytheism from the highest to the lowest. The man who wishes to regard without prejudice religious realities at the present day, must take into account that polytheism, from its highest expression in the Hindu One of the Christian Trinity to its most degraded, holds away over two-thirds at least of

ings from the Upanishads, sermons on Vedic texts, singing of hymns mostly composed by Roy himself accompanied musically by a Mohammedan, took place



ranked. Roy called himself correctly a "Hindu unitarian," and did not hesitate to borrow from the two great unitarian religions, Islam and Christianity.' But he offended himself strenuously against the reproach of "eclecticism," and his disciples are agreed on that point. He held that doctrine ought to rest on original synthetic analysis, sounding the depths of religious experience. It is not then to be confounded with the nominalism of the Vedānta nor with Christian unitarianism. The theism of Roy claims to rest on two poles, the "absolute" Vedānta and the Euclypædic thought of the eighteenth century—the Formless God and Reason.

It was not easy to define and it was still less easy to realise after he had gone, for it implied a rare harmony of critical intelligence and faith going as far as the enlightenment of a noble mysticism consistently controlled and dominated by reason. Royally constituted physically and morally, he was able to attain the heights of contemplation without losing for an instant the balance of his everyday life or interrupting his daily course; he was protected against and disarmingly avoided the emotional excess to which the Bhaktas of Bengal were a prey? It is not

1 Ram Mohun Roy's Hindu Unitarianism is nearer to the Bible than the doctrine of his immediate successors at the head of the Brahmo Samaj, especially Debendranath

For the Raja Samadhi is not an abnormal physiological change of the body that can be effected at will, not unconsciousness generated as in sound sleep, but the highly

until we reach Aurobindo Ghose a century later that we find the same aristocratic freedom—diverse powers linked to the highest type of man. It was not easily communicable and in fact proved impossible to communicate intact. Not and pure though the successors of Ram Mohan Roy were, they changed his doctrine out of recognition. Nevertheless the Constitution of the Brahmo Samaj—the Magna Carta Dei—which included such part as could be understood and assimilated by his successors, founded a new or

vigorous campaigns for social reform, supported

spiritual culture of perceiving Brahman in all and the habit of surrendering the self to the higher will. Atmasakshatkar to him was not to deny the existence of the world, but to perceive God in every bit of perception. Ram Mohan was pre-eminently a Sadhaka.

Though a Vedantist in every pulse of his being, he did not fail to perceive that the Upanishads were not sufficient to satisfy the Bhakti hungerings of the soul, nor was he able to side with the Bhakti cult of Bengal. But he hoped that the needs of Bhakti would be met by the Sufis.

We cannot attempt to give here a full list of his innumerable reforms or attempted reforms. Let it suffice to mention among the chief—Sati (the burning of widows), which he proved to be contrary to the sacred texts and which he persuaded the British Government to forbid in 1829, and his campaign against polygamy, his attempts to secure the remarriage of widows, intercaste marriage, Indian unity, friendship between Hindus and Mussulmans, Hindu education which he wished to model on the same scientific lines as Europe and for which he wrote in Bengali numerous text books on Geography, Astronomy, Geometry, Grammar, etc., the education of women based on the example of ancient India, liberty of thought and of the Press, legal reforms, political equality, etc.

In 1818 he founded a Bengali newspaper, the father of the modern Press of India, a Persian paper on the paper and the first Monitor for the study of Urdu among

by the English administration, more liberal and more intelligent than that of to-day. There was nothing particular about her patriotism. She cared for nothing but liberty and civil and religious freedom. Far from desiring the expansion of England from India, she wished her to be established there in such a way that her blood, her soul and her thought would intermingle with the Chinese and not as a blood sucking Ethel. She was not exhausted. She was so far as to wish to provide for China as that country desired, to make China Western society and then to achieve independence and enlighten the rest of Asia. The newspapers were in possession in the cause of liberty on behalf of all the nations of the world. Nations studied under her action, revolutionary France in the days of 1793. But this kind of action of revolution with it (and it was really in fact, and the first revolution of France) was not the first of France.

at London and at Court. He made many illustrious friends, Bentham among their number, paid a short visit to France, and then died of brain fever at Bristol on September 27, 1833, where he is

alone?"

—or to use the language of Europe, its meaning being the same, "of Human Unity."

This man of gigantic personality, whose name to our shame is not inscribed in the Pantheon of Europe as well as of Asia, sank his ploughshare in the soil of India and sixty years of labour left her transformed. A great writer of Sanskrit, Bengali, Arabic, Persian and English, the father of modern Bengali prose, the author of celebrated hymns, poems, sermons, philosophic treatises and political and controversial writings of all kinds, he sowed his thoughts and his passion broadcast. And out of the earth of Bengal has come forth the harvest—a harvest of works and men.

And from his inspiration (a fact of supreme importance) sprang the Tagores.

The poet's grandfather, Dwāraкінth Tagore, a friend of Ram Mohun Roy, was the chief supporter of the Brahma Samaj after the latter's death.<sup>1</sup> Rāmakrishnāth's father, Dwāraкінth Tagore (1817-1855), Roy's second successor after

<sup>1</sup> Dwāraкінth, his son, died during a journey to England in 1866. This double death in the West is a sign of the current carrying towards Europe the best ideas of the Brahma Samaj.

the interregnum of Rāmchandra Vidyāvaṣiṣṭh, was the man who really organised the Brahmo Samaj. This noble figure, avenged in history with the name of Saint (Maharshi) bestowed upon him by his people, merits some attempt at a short description.

He had the physical and spiritual beauty, the high intellect, the moral purity, the aristocratic perfection, which he has bequeathed to his children. Moreover, he possessed the same deep and warm poetic sensibility.

Born at Calcutta, the eldest son of a rich family, brought up in orthodox traditions, his adolescence was exposed to the seductions of the world and the snares of pleasure, from which he was rescued by a visitation of death to his home. But he was to pass through a long moral crisis before he reached the threshold of religious peace. It is characteristic that his decisive advances were always the result of poetic emotions roused by some accidental harmonies: the word that arrested

all and follow Him! Enjoy his inexhaustible riches. . . ."

In 1839 with his brothers and sisters and several friends he founded a Society for the propagation of the truths in which they believed. Three years later he joined the Brahmo Samaj and became its leading spirit. It was he who built up its faith and ritual. He organised its regular worship and founded a school of theology for the training of ministers, preached himself and in 1848 wrote in Sanskrit the *Brāhmo Dharma*, "a theistic manual of religion and ethics for the edification of the faithful." He himself considered that it was inspired.<sup>1</sup> The source of his inspiration, of quite a different order from that of Ram Mohun Roy, was almost entirely the Upanishads but subjected to a free interpretation.<sup>2</sup> Devendranath after-

<sup>1</sup> An English translation has just been published by H. Chandra Sarker. The *Brāhmo Dharma* has had a large circulation in India, where it has been translated into different dialects.

<sup>2</sup> "It was in the language of the Upanishads like a river, spiritual truths flowed through my mind by His grace." The danger with this process of inspired legislation, the natural expression of a man of Devendranath's temperament, is that on the one hand, his Brahmo Samaj maintained that "Truth is the only eternal and imperishable scripture" and did not recognise any other holy book as scripture, and, on the other, that Truth rested on the authority of this inner outpouring which had issued in the last resort from several of the Hindu Scriptures, chosen and commented upon in a preconcerted sense.

<sup>3</sup> Devendranath's attitude to the Holy Books was not always consistent. Between 1844 and 1848 at Benares he seems to have considered that the Vedas were infallible, but later after 1847 he abandoned this idea and individual inspiration gained the upper hand.

wards laid down the four articles of faith of the Brahmo Samaj

1. In the beginning was nothing. The One Supreme Being alone existed. He created the universe.

2. He alone is the God of Truth, Infinite Wisdom, Goodness and Power, Eternal and Omnipresent, the One without second.

3. Our salvation depends on belief in Him and in His worship in this world and the next.

4. Belief consists in loving Him and doing His will

The faith of the Brahmo Samaj then is a faith in a One God, who created the universe out of nothing, and who is characterised essentially by the Spirit of Kindness, and whose absolute adoration is necessary for the salvation of man in the next world.

I have no means of judging whether this is as purely Hindu a conception as Devendranath thought it was. But it is interesting to note that the Tagore family belong to a community of Brahmans called Pritis, or chief ministers, a post occupied by its members under the Mussulman regime. In a sense they were put outside caste by their relations with *Mohammedans*; it is, however, perhaps not too much to say that the persistent rigour of their theism has been due to this influence. From Dvaraknath to Rabindranath they have been the implacable enemies of all forms of idolatry.

'C. Manjula Dave The Poetry of Rabindranath Tagore, 1927  
Over the door of Santalitan, the home of the Tagores, an inscription runs "In this place no image





improvised sermons deeply moving to his Calcutta public. Further he bestowed upon the Brahmo Samaj a new liturgy inspired by the Upanishads and impregnated with an ardent and pure spirituality. A short time after his return from the Himalayas in 1862 he adopted as his coadjutor Keshab Chunder Sen, a young man of twenty-three, who was destined to surpass him and to provoke a schism, or rather a series of schisms, in the Brahmo Samaj.

This man, who only lived from 1838 to 1884, uttersolite, restless but at the same time inspired, was the chief personality to influence the Brahmo appeal later addressed by Rabindranath to the "Shepherd of the nation."

"To unite their love at Thy shrine  
 "Victory to Thee who makest one the minds of all  
 people  
 "Victory to Thee, Builder of India's destiny" (The  
 fugitive: "Call to the Fatherland")  
 In point of fact Rabindranath protested by the wider  
 thought given to the primitive Brahmo Samaj by Keshab  
 Chunder Sen.  
 For Keshab Chunder Sen, see  
 Pandit Gour Gonda Roy. Nine volumes have  
 appeared of a biography in Bengali  
 Prasad Chunder Monomdar (his chief disciple and  
 successor). The Faith and Progress of the Brahmo Samaj.

According to K. T. Paul, Devendranath had wage a prolonged struggle, on the one hand against the practices of orthodox Hinduism, and on the other, against Christian propaganda which sought to gain a footing in the Brahmo Samaj. The need for defence led him to surround the citadel with a fortification of firm and right principles picket posts. The bridge was raised between and the two extremes of Indian religion—polytheism, which Devendranath strictly prohibited, and the absolute monism of Sankara; for the Brahmo Burg was the stronghold of the great Dualism of the One and personal God and Human Reason, to whom God has granted the power and the right to interpret the Scriptures. I have already pointed out that in Devendranath's case and still more that of his successors, Reason had a tendency to be confused with religious inspiration. About 1800 from the depths of an eighteen months' retreat in the Himalayas near the Simla Hills he produced a garland of solitary meditation.<sup>2</sup> These thoughts were later expanded into "is to be adored" But it goes on to add: "And no man's faith is to be despised."

Islamic influences in the infancy of Ram Mohun Ray as well must always be borne in mind in considering the penetration of the Indian spirit with the current of monotheism.

To such a degree that at his father's death in 1846 he

his father's creditors in full and of meeting all the engagements made by his prodigality, for he died heavily in debt.

His young son, Rabindranath, accompanied him.

I love to associate with the magnificent memories of this impassioned retreat in the Himalayas, the wonderful

improvised sermons deeply moving to his Calcutta public. Further he bestowed upon the Brahmo Samaj a new liturgy inspired by the Upanishads and impregnated with an ardent and pure spirituality. A short time after his return from the Himalayas in 1862 he adopted as his coadjutor Keshab Chunder Sen, a young man of twenty-three, who was destined to surpass him and to provoke a schism, or rather a series of schisms, in the Brahmo Samaj.

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 8

Samaj during the second half of the nineteenth century. He enriched and renewed it to such extent that he endangered its very existence.

He was the representative of a different class and generation much more deeply impregnated with Western influences. Instead of being a great aristocrat like Roy and Devendranath, he belonged to the liberal and distinguished middle class Bengal, who were in constant intellectual touch with Europe. He belonged to the sub-caste physicians. His grandfather, a remarkable man, a native secretary of the Asiatic Society, had control over the publication of all the editions of books published in Hindustani. He was left an orphan at an early age, and was brought up in an English school. It was this that made him so different from his two predecessors, for he never knew Sanskrit and very soon broke away from the popular forms of the Hindu religion.<sup>1</sup> Christ

32. Calcutta. *Aims and Principles of Keshab Chunder Sen*, 1889, Calcutta.

Pramotho Loil Sen. *Keshab Chunder Sen, a Study*, 1912, new edition, 1915, Calcutta.

T. L. Vaswami. *Sri Keshab Chunder Sen a Social Mystic*.

had touched him, and it was to be his mission in life to introduce him into the Brahmo Samaj, and into the heart of a group of the best minds in India. When he died *The Indian Christian Herald* said of him "The Christian Church mourns the death of its greatest ally. Christians looked upon him as God's messenger, sent to awake India to the spirit of Christ. Thanks to him hatred of Christ died out."

This last statement is not quite correct, for we shall see to what point Keshab himself had to suffer as the champion of Christ. The real significance of his life has been obscured by most of the men who have spoken of him even within the Brahmo Samaj, for they were offended by the treachery of their church and tried to hide it. He himself only revealed it by degrees so that it is through documents written as long as twenty years before this . . . that we learn from his own

serious confidential letter to his intimate disciple, Pratap Chunder Mozoomdar,' a letter of prime importance passed over in silence by all Christian Brahmos, he shows us how he was waiting until the time was ripe to make public avowal of his faith in Christ. The double life Keshab lived for so long, was partly caused by the duality of his own character, compounded as it was of the diverse and incompatible elements of the East and the West, which were in constant conflict with each other. Hence it is very difficult for the historian to make an impartial study; Hindu

the Baptist. He passed away, and then came another prophet far greater than he, the prophet of Nazareth. "Take no thought for the morrow" These words of Jesus found a lasting lodgment in my heart. Hardly had Jesus finished his words, when came another prophet, and that was the travelled ambassador of Christ, the strong, heroic and valiant Apostle Paul. And his words (relating to chastity) came upon me like a burning fire at a most critical period of my life."

It should be added that he had gained a knowledge of the New Testament at the English College, for a chaplain used to read it to the young people, translating it from the Greek.

... but is concerned with self-sacrifice and as he lived and preached in the fulness of time, so must he be in turn preached in the fulness of time. . . I am, therefore, patiently waiting that I may grow with the age and the nation and the spirit of Christ's sacrifice may grow therewith." (Cf. Manik C. Parekh: op. cit. pp. 20-21).

biographers, in nearly every case holy partizan, have done nothing to lighten his task.

He was introduced to the Brahmo Samaj by Devendranath Tagore's son, a student of the same college, and during the early days of his admission, young Keshab was surrounded with love. He became the darling of Devendranath and of the young members of the Brahmo Samaj, who felt themselves drawn into closer contact with him than with the noble Devendranath, dwelling in spite of himself in Olympian isolation as the result of his breeding and idealism. Keshab had a social sense and wished to rouse the same feeling throughout India. A hyper-individualist by nature and doubtless just because this was the case, he early in life recognised that part of the

notion by his accredited Indian biographers  
 "Devendranath was too preoccupied by his personal relationship to God to feel more than moderately the call of social responsibilities" (From a letter of a friend of the Tagores)

evils of his country arose out of this same hyper-individualism, and that India needed to acquire a new moral conscience. "Let all souls be socialised and realise their unity with the people, the visible community." This conception, uniting<sup>1</sup> the aristocratic unitarianism of Roy to the Indian masses, put young Keshab into communion with the most ardent aspirations of the rising generation. Just as Vivekananda in after days (Vivekananda incidentally owed him a great deal without perhaps realising it; for ideas are the natural outcome of the age and are born at the same time in different minds), Keshab believed religion to be necessary for the regeneration of the race. In an address at Bombay in 1868 he maintained that he wished to make it "the basis of social reforms." Hence religious reform within the Brahmo Samaj was to bear fruit in action. Keshab's active, but somewhat restless hand was therefore to be seen casting into the soil of India, a handful of fruitful

<sup>1</sup> In theory at least. In practice Keshab never succeeded in touching the masses. His thought was too impregnated with Unitarianism alien to the thought of India.



seeds, which in his turn Vivekananda sowed broadcast with powerful arm upon the mother-country already awakened by the thunder of his words. But Keshab came before his time. Some of his

and Devendranath was the question of inter-caste marriages, but I am certain that there were others far more important. Their mutual affection has drawn a veil over the causes of their separation, but from what happened immediately afterwards, they can be surmised. However open Devendranath's mind might be to the great ideal of constructing the harmony of humanity through the Brahmo Samaj, he remained deeply attached to Indian tradition and her sacred Writings. He could not be blind to the Christianity working in the mind of his favourite disciple, and at what-ever personal cost, he could no longer remain in association with a coadjutor who based his teachings on the New Testament.

"Devendranath could not bear radical changes. He rendered full justice to the West, and highly appreciated Fenslon, Ritchie and Victor Cousin. But he could not tolerate aggressive demonstrations of fanatical zeal. Keshab was a zealot, who wished to lead his disciples in a veritable crusade against India's social evils."

In 1860 the fatal rupture took place, and there was a schism in the Brahmo Samaj. Devendranath kept the direction of the Adi Brahmo Samaj (the first Brahmo Samaj),<sup>1</sup> and Keshab departed to found the Brahmo Samaj of India. For both men this was a severe trial, but especially for Keshab, whose heresy made him hated. At first he did not foresee this contingency. Strong in his popularity and the ardent support of his faithful friends, three months after the break he made a public declaration in his famous lecture on *Jews*

“Asiatic nature is susceptible.” His Christianity was still in the main a question of ethics. Keshab was attracted by the morality of Christ and his two principles of pardon and self-sacrifice. Through these principles and through Him he maintained that “Europe and Asia may learn to find harmony and unity.”

His ardour as a neophyte was such that he made his friends call him *Jesudās*, or the servant of Jesus, and he celebrated Christmas by a fast within a small circle of intimate friends.

But the lecture had created a scandal, and

“... conclusion of faith when he separated from Keshab. At that time Keshab was deep in the study of Christianity, and in particular occupied in reading a book which had a great vogue at that time—Deeley's *Ever Home*.”

eschab did not improve matters by a second speech upon Great Men (1860). Therein, if I may use such an expression, he made Jesus come to line among the messengers of God, each one of whom was charged with his own special message, and was to be accepted without special attachment to any single one. He threw open is Church to men of all countries and all ages, and introduced for the first time extracts from the Bible, the Koran, the Zend Avesta into the annual of devotional lessons for the use of the Beshimo Samaj. But far from dying down, feeling ran higher.

Keshab was not the man to be unmoved by it. His sensitive and defenceless heart suffered more than most from disaffection. Public misunderstanding, the desertion of his companions, heavy material difficulties, and over and above all the tortments of his own conscience, perhaps even doubts as to his mission, added to "a very lively sense of weakness, of sin and of repentance" peculiarly his own as distinct from most of the other religious spirits of Hinduism," resulted in a

of the Hebrew Slave

of the Hindu Samaj." It is P. C. Ghoshdhar who noted in him this "sense of sin," so curiously at variance with the spirit of Deterdina-  
nath as well as Ramakrishna and above all of Vivekananda.  
We shall see later that Vivekananda denounced it as  
evidence of a weak disposition, a real mental malady, for  
which he threw the blame on Christianity. The state of

devastating crisis of soul, which lasted till  
out 1807. He was alone with his grief, &  
any outside help, alone with God. But God

only in his ideas but in their expression. When  
then he had been the chief among religious  
lecturers, a moralist, a stranger to sentiment  
effusions, which had been repellent to him;  
now he was flooded by a torrent of emotion—  
and tears—and gave himself up to it in rapture.

This was the dawn of a new era for  
Brahmo Samaj. The mysticism of the  
Bhakta, Chaitanya, and the Sankirtans  
introduced within its walls. From morning  
night there were prayers and hymns ac-  
panied by Vaishnavite musical instruments, &  
feasts of God'; and Keshab officiated at them.  
his face bathed in tears—he, who, it was said,  
had never wept. The wave of emotion spread  
Keshab's sincerity, his spirit of universal com-  
prehension and his care for the public we-  
brought him the sympathy alike of the best mind

mind that Keshab systematically cultivated culminated  
a sermon delivered in 1881. *The Apostles of the New Dis-*  
pensation, where he likened himself to Judas, much to the  
scandal of his hearers.

There was no other  
to P. C.  
of his inde-  
one hand,  
the other. His enemies  
took account of it in 1884 when some of them reported  
maliciously to Ramakrishna that Keshab had claimed to  
and Chaitanya."

of India and England, including the Viceroy. His journey to England in 1870 was a triumphal progress. The enthusiasm he roused was equal to that inspired by Kossuth. During his six months' stay, he addressed seven meetings of 10,000 persons and fascinated his audiences by the simplicity of his English and by his musical voice. He was compared to Gladstone. He was greeted as the spiritual ally of the West, the Evangelist of Christ in the East. In all good faith both sides were labouring under delusions, destined to be dissipated during the following years, not without a naive deception of the English. For Keshab remained deeply Indian at heart and was not to be enrolled in the ranks of European Christianity. On the other hand, he thought he could enrol it. India and the Brahmo Samaj profited from the good disposition of the Government. In its reconstituted form, it spread in all directions, to Simla, Bombay, Lahore,

forerunner of the great voyage of exploration undertaken twenty years later by Vivekananda in the guise of a wandering Sannyasin. The tour opened up new horizons and he believed that he had found the key to popular polytheism, so repugnant to the Brahmo Samaj, and that he

would make an alliance between it and them. But to this union, realised especially by Ramakrishna at the same time, brought a spirit of intellectual compromise was obliged to convince himself (he failed since the polytheists) that their gods were bottom nothing but the names of different halves of the one God.

"Their (Hindu) idolatry," he wrote in *Sunday Mirror*,<sup>\*</sup> "is nothing but the worship of divine attributes materialised. If the material shape is given up, what remains is a beautiful allegory. . . . We have found out that the idol worshipped by the Hindu represents an attribute of God, and that each attribute is called by a peculiar name. The believer in the Dispensation is required to worship God as possessor of all those attributes, represented the Hindu as innumerable, or three hundred thirty millions. To believe in an undivided Deity, without reference to the aspects of His nature is to believe in an abstract God, and would lead us to practical rationalism and infidelity. If we are to worship Him in all His manifestations, we shall name one attribute Lakshmi, another Saraswati, another Mahadeva, etc. . . ."

This meant a great step forward in religious comprehension, embracing as it did the greater part of mankind.<sup>†</sup> But it never came to anything, because Keshab intended that his Theism should have all the real power and polytheism was to

<sup>\*</sup> See Note II. at the end of the volume — *Publisher*  
<sup>†</sup> August 1, 1830 "The Philosophy of Idol-worship"

receive nothing but outward honour. On the other hand, he avoided Advaitism, absolute Monism, which has always been forbidden to the Brahmo. The result was that religious reason sat on the fence separating the two camps of the two extreme faiths. The prevailing situation was not an exact equilibrium of rest, and the position in which Keshab insisted on placing himself could not be a permanent one. For he believed that he was called by God to dictate His new revealed law, the New Dispensation, from thence. He began to proclaim it in 1873, 'the year when his relations with Ramakrishna began.

Like so many self-appointed legislators, he found it difficult to establish law and order in his own mind, especially as he wished his legislation to be all-embracing and to include Christ and Brahman, the Gospels and Yoga, religion and reason. Ramakrishna reached the same point in all simplicity through his heart, and made no attempt to fence his discovery within a body of doctrine and precept; he was content to show the way, to set the example, to give the impetus. Keshab adopted at the same time the methods of an intellectual European at the head of a school of comparative religion, and the methods of inspired persons of India and America—Bhakti in tears, Revelals and public confessions. He gave to each of his favourite disciples a different form of religion to study, and Yoga to

In the Lecture, Behold the light of Heaven in India. Each of his four chosen disciples dedicated himself to a lifelong study of one of the four great religions, and in some cases was absorbed into the subject of his study. Upadhyaya Gour Govinda Roy was given Hinduism and

practise.<sup>1</sup> His skill as a teacher was shown in choosing for each disciple the one best adapted to his individual character. He himself oscillated between two advisors, both equally dear to him—the living example of Ramakrishna to whom he went for guidance in ecstasy, and the precepts of the Christian faith as practised by an Anglican monk, who later became a Roman Catholic, Luke Rivington. Moreover he could never choose between the life of God and the life of the world, and with disarming sincerity he maintained that the one was not necessarily harmful to the other.<sup>2</sup>

But the confusion of his mind wronged him and



reacted on the Brahmo Samaj, all the more because he was a man "of the most transparent sincerity," who neglected the most elementary precautions to conceal the changeableness and heterogeneity of his nature. The result was a new schism in the Brahmo Samaj in 1878, and Keshab found himself the butt of violent attacks from his own people, who accused him of having betrayed his principles. The majority of his friends deserted him and so he fell inevitably into the hands of the few faithful ones that remained—Ramakrishna and Father Luke Livingston. Moreover this new trial reopened the door to a whole flood of professions of the Christian faith, which became more and more explicit and in accordance with the deepest metaphysics of Christianity. Thus in the lecture *I am an Inspired Prophet* (January 1879), he described his childish vision of John the Baptist, Christ and St. Paul. In India says, *Who is Christ* (Easter 1879), he announced to India the coming of "the Bridgroom. . . my Christ, my sweet Christ, born of God and man," and in *Does God Manti-*

Samaj, more narrow and definitely anti-Christian. "My Master Jesus. . . Young men of India Believe and remember. He will come to you as self-surrender, as asceticism, as Yoga. The Bridgroom cometh. Let India, beloved India, be dressed in all her jewellery." Again Keshab declared in his articles in *The Indian Mirror* "What the Brahmo Samaj did to clear the moral character of Christ more than twelve years ago, it does

*jest Himself Alone?* he<sup>1</sup> showed the Son sitting the right hand of the Father.

All these pronouncements, however, did hinder him from dictating at the same time, the heights of the Himalayas his famous *Epistle to Indian Brethren* (1880) for the jubilee of

that the words came out of the Bible:

"Hearken, Oh Hindustan, the Lord your God is one,"

So begins the *Epistle to the Indian Brethren*.

"Jehovah the great spirit, whose clouds thou 'I am', whom the heavens and the earth declare . . ."

"I write this epistle to you, dear and beloved friends, in the spirit and after the manner of Paul, however unworthy I am of his honour Master. . . ."

But he adds:

"Paul wrote full of faith in Christ. As a theologian I write to you this, my humble epistle, at the feet, not of one prophet only, but of all the prophets in heaven and earth, living or dead. . . ."

with respect to his divinity at the present day." (April 20, 1879) There were no half measures about this Christ was God.

And again: "The Moslem dispensation only? Perhaps the Hindu dispensation also. In India He will fulfil the Hindu dispensation."

This lecture followed and completed another: *God-Fusion in the Nineteenth Century*, wherein Keshab in his homage to science, is a forerunner of Vivekananda, who has joined heaven and earth.

<sup>1</sup> *City of God*—that is to say, the City (Rome) and the world (like the Roman Pope).





Lord will reveal to us in ten years' time who can say, except himself?"

But how is this free and broad them with its serene and assured tone to be reconciled to his abasement at the feet of Christ in the previous year?

"I must tell you . . . that I am connected with Jesus' Gospel, and occupy a prominent place in it. I am the prodigal son of whom Christ spoke and I am trying to return to my Father in a penitent spirit. Nay, I will say more for the satisfaction and edification of my opponents. . . . I am Judas, that vile man who betrayed Jesus . . . the veritable Judas who sinned against the truth. And Jesus lodges in my heart!"

The overwhelming effect of such a public confession on those members of the Ibrahim Samaj, who had followed their chief up to that point, may be imagined.

But Keshab was still debating with himself. He professed Christ but he denied that he was a "Christian." He tried to unite Christ to Socrates

"In the sermon . . . the Apostles of the New Dispensation (1841) That is why their writings about Keshab are very careful (as far as I know) to make no mention of such an avowal"

"However Christ but never be 'Christian' in the popular acceptance of the term. Christ is not Christianity. Let it be your ambition to outgrow the popular types of narrow Christian faith and merge in the vastness of Christ."

In an article of the same period called "Other Sheep have I" "We belong to no Christian sect. We disdain the Christian name. And the immediate disciples of Christ call themselves Christians? Whoso believes in God and accepts Christ as the Son of God has fellowship with Christ in the Lord. How explicit is that well-known passage



accumulated wealth of the world's sacred literature—all that is precious in philosophy, theology, and poetry (of all humanity) . . . the loftiest expression of the world's religious consciousness. . . . He defines the three persons very exactly. I believe, from an orthodox point of view. Did anything still separate him from Christianity? Only one thing but it was a world in itself—his own message, the Indian "Dispensation." He could never bring himself to renounce it. He indeed adopted Christ, but Christ in his turn had to adopt India and the theism of Keshab. "Hegone," adolary, 'Preachers of idol-worship, adieu'" (This apostrophe was addressed to the

may be as not without any and such as . . .  
 God returns to himself In the same way we come  
 out of God by the Son, we return to him by grace, which is  
 the attribute of the Holy Spirit.  
 (P. Claude Segond, *Conquête d'Oraison*, 1931, quoted  
 by Henri Bremond, *La Mystique des Saints*, I,  
 pp. 116-117)

West). Christ is the eternal Word. "As sleeping Logos Christ lived potentially in the Father's bosom, long, long before he came into this world of ours." He appeared before his physical life in Greece and Rome, in Egypt and in India, in the poets of the Rig-Veda, as well as in Confucius and Sākya-Muni; and the role of this Indian apostle of the New Dispensation was to proclaim his true and universal meaning. For after the Son came the Spirit and "this Church of the New Dispensation . . . is altogether an institution of the Holy Spirit" and completes the Old and the New Testaments.

And so no part of this Himalayan theism was lost in spite of rude shocks from above and below, which might well have undermined its citadel. By a violent effort of thought, Keshab achieved the incorporation of Christ within it, and covered his own New Dispensation with the name of Christ, believing that he was called to reveal the real meaning of Christ to Western Christianity.

This was the avowed object of Keshab's last message before his death, *Asia's Message to Europe* (1883) "Sectarian and carnal Europe, put up into the scabbard the sword of your narrow faith! Abjure it and join the true Catholic and Universal Church in the name of Christ, the Son of God! . . ."

"Christian Europe has not understood one half of Christ's words. She has comprehended that Christ and God are one, but not that Christ and humanity are one. That is the great mystery, which the New Dispensation reveals to the world: not only the r . . . God; but



the reconciliation of man with man! . . . Asia says to Europe: 'Sister, be one in Christ! . . . All that is good and true and beautiful—the meekness of Hindu Asia, the truthfulness of the Mussulman and the charity of the Buddhist—all that is holy is of Christ. . . .'

And the new Pope of the new Rome in Asia intones the beautiful Song of Atonement,<sup>1</sup> But he was a real Pope, and the unity of reconciled mankind had to be according to his doctrine; in order to defend it he always kept the thunderbolt in his hand, and he refused all compromise on the subject of the unitheistic principle—the Unity of God.

"Science is one. The Church is one."

His disciple, B. Mozoomdar, makes him use the denunciatory words of Christ, but more violently.

"There is only one way. There is no back-door into heaven. He who enters not by the front door is a thief and a robber."

This is the antithesis of the smiling words of kindness uttered by Ramakrishna.<sup>2</sup> The innate need of unitarian discipline which

"And the new Song of Atonement is sung with enthusiasm by millions of voices, representing all the languages of the world. Millions of souls, each dressed in its national garb of poetry and righteousness, flowing in an infinite and complete variety of colours, shall dance round and round the Father's throne, and peace and joy shall reign for ever."

" . . . (stands) . . . away . . . is displayed . . . " . . . "My . . . id not . . . if one . . ."

does not tally with religious universalism & often unwittingly merges into spiritual imperialism, led Keshab at the end of his life to lay down the code of the New Samhitā' (September 1883), containing what he calls "the national law of the Aryans of the New Church in India . . . God's moral law adapted to the peculiar needs and character of reformed Hindus, and based upon their national instincts and traditions." It contains in effect a national unitarianism—one God, one scripture, one baptism, one marriage—a whole code of injunctions for the family, for the home, for business, for study, for amusement, for charity, for relationships, etc. But his code is a purely abstract one for an India that had not yet come into existence, and whose advent is doubtful.

Was he himself sure that it would ever come? The entire edifice of voluntary reason rested on uncertain foundations, on a nature divided between East and West. When illness came the cement was loosened. To whom was his soul to belong, Christ or Kālī? On his deathbed Ramakrishna, Devendranath—his old master to whom he was now reconciled, and the Bishop of Calcutta all visited him. On January 1, 1884, he went out for the last time to consecrate a new sanctuary

to the Divine Mother, but on January 8, his deathbed was enveloped in the words of a hymn sung at his own request by one of his disciples about Christ's agony in Gethsemane.

It was impossible for a nation of simple souls to find their way amid such a constant mental oscillation. But it makes Keshab nearer and more appealing to us, who can study his most intimate thoughts and can see the mental torture accompanying it. It is also true that the kind and penetrating vision of Ramakrishna understood and penetrated anybody else the hidden tragedy of a being exhausting itself in searching after God, whose body was the prey of the unseen God. But has a born leader any right, even if he keeps his anguish to himself, to yield to such oscillations in his very last hours? They were his legacy to the Brahmo Samaj, and though they enriched its spirit they weakened its authority in India for a long time, if not for ever. We may well ask with Max Müller whether the logical outcome of

'I shall have more to say about the last touching visit of Ramakrishna to Keshab and the profound words he poured out like balm on the hidden wounds of the dying

zoomdar, Brahmo is of his adopt the name Christian and did not organize itself as a national in P. C. disciples reserves a

He passed another  
- Anglican  
- also a  
- if Keshab  
had lived several years longer he would have entered the



fect, which had been itself nourished by the idealism and the Christ of Europe. In social matters none of his predecessors, with the exception of Roy, had done so much for her progress, but he ran counter to the rising tide of national consciousness, then feverishly awakening. Against him were the three hundred million gods of India and three hundred million living beings in whom they were incarnate—the whole vast jungle of human dreams wherein his Western outlook made him miss the track and the scent. He invited them to lose themselves in his Indian Christ, but his invitation remained unanswered. They did not even seem to have heard it.

\*

Indian religious thought raised a purely Indian samaj against Keshab's Brahmo Samaj and against all attempt at Westernisation, even during his lifetime, and at its head was a personality of the highest order, Dayananda Sarasvati' (1824-1883)

This man with the nature of a lion is one of those, whom Europe is too apt to forget when she judges India, but whom she will probably be forced to remember to her cost, for he was that rare combination, a thinker of action with a genius for leadership, like Vivekananda' after him.

'His real name, abandoned by himself, was Tulshankar Sarasvati was the surname of his Guru, whom he regarded as his true father. For Dayananda's life it is necessary to consult the classical book of Lalpat Rai (the great nationalist Indian leader, who has just died) *The Arya Samaj* with an introduction by Sidney Webb, Longmans, Green & Co., London, 1913. But although the energy of the two men, the immense

grumage as a young man over the length and breadth of Hindustan. Like him Dayananda went in search of learned men, ascetics, study here philosophy, there the Vedas, learning theory and practice of Yoga. Like him he visited almost all the holy places of India and took part in religious debates. Like him he suffered, braved fatigue, insult and danger, and this contact with the body of his fatherland lasted for times longer than Vivekananda's experience. In contradistinction to the latter, however, Dayananda remained far from the human masses through which he passed, for the simple reason that he spoke nothing but Sanskrit throughout this period. He was indeed what Vivekananda would have been, if he had not encountered Ramakrishna, and if his high aristocratic and Puritan pride had not been curbed by the indulgent kindness and rare spirit of comprehension of this most human of Gurus. Dayananda did not see, did not wish to see, anything round him but superstition and ignorance, spiritual laxity, degrading prejudices and the millions of idols he abominated. At length about 1860 he found at Mathura an old Guru even more implacable than himself in his condemnation of all weakness and his hatred of superstition, a Sannyâsin blind from infancy and from the age of eleven quite alone in the world, a learned man, a terrible man, Swâmi Virjânanda Sarasvaty. Dayananda put himself under his "discipline,"<sup>1</sup> which in its old

<sup>1</sup> Discipline in the ecclesiastical language of an earlier age meant not only supervision, but the instrument used by ascetics to scourge themselves.

lateral seventeenth century sense scarred his flesh as well as his spirit. Dayananda served this unimable and indomitable man for two and a half years as his pupil. It is therefore more justice to remember that his subsequent course of action was simply the fulfilment of the will of the stern hind man, whose surname he adopted, casting is own to oblivion. When they separated Virjanda extracted from him the promise that he would consecrate his life to the annihilation of the heresies that had crept into the Puranic faith, to re-establish the ancient religious methods of the age before Buddha, and to disseminate the truth.

Dayananda immediately began to preach in Northern India, but unlike the benign men of God who open all heaven before the eyes of their hearers, he was a hero of the Iliad or of the Gita with the athletic strength of a Hercules, who thundered against all forms of thought other than his own, the only true one. He was so successful that in five years Northern India was completely changed. During these five years his life was attempted four or five times—sometimes by poison. Once a fanatic threw a cobra at his face in the name of Shiva, but he caught it and crushed it. It was impossible to get the better of him; for he possessed an univalled knowledge of Sanskrit and the Vedas, while the burning of his words brought his adversaries

to naught. They likened him to a flood. . since Sankara had such a prophet of V appeared. The orthodox Brahmins, comp overwhelmed, appealed from him to Ben their Rome. Dayananda went there fearl and undertook in November, 1869, a Homere test. Before millions of assailants, all eag bring him to his knees, he argued for h together alone against three hundred pandits- whole front line and the reserve of Hindu or doxy.' He proved that the Vedānta as pract was diametrically opposed to the primitive Ve He claimed that he was going back to the t Word, the pure Law of two thousand ye earlier. They had not the patience to hear h out. He was hooted down and excommunicat A void was created round him, but the echo such a combat in the style of the *Mahābhāra* spread throughout the country, so that his nan became famous over the whole of India.

At Calcutta, where he stayed from Decembe 15, 1872 to April 15, 1873, Ramakrishna met him. He was also cordially received by the Brahm Samaj. Keshab and his people voluntarily shu their eyes to the differences existing between them, they saw in him a rough ally in their crusade against orthodox prejudices and the millions of gods. But Dayananda was not a man to come to an understanding with religious philosophers imbued with Western ideas. His



national Indian theism, its steel faith forged from the pure metal of the Vedas alone, had nothing in common with theirs, tinged as it was with modern doubt, which denied the infallibility of the Vedas and the doctrine of transmigration.' He broke with them the richer for the encounter, for he 'wired them' the very simple suggestion, whose practical value had not struck him before, that his propaganda would be of little effect unless it was delivered in the language of the people. He went to Bombay, where shortly afterwards he met, following the example of the Brahmo Samaj, not with a better genius of organisation, proceeded to take root in the social life of India. On April 10, 1875, he founded at Bombay his first Arya Samaj, or Association of the Aryans of India, the pure Indians, the descendants of the old conquering race of the Indus and the Ganges. And it was exactly in those districts that it took root most strongly. From 1877, the year when its principles were definitely laid down at Lahore,

to 1883, Dayananda spread a close network over Northern India, Rajputana, Gujarat, the United Provinces of Agra and Oudh, and above all the Punjab, which remained his chosen land. Practically the whole of India was affected. The only Province where his influence failed to make itself felt was Madras.\*

He fell, struck down in his prime, by an assassin. The concubine of a Maharajah, whom the stern prophet had denounced, poisoned him. He died at Ajmere on October 30, 1883.

But his work pursued its uninterrupted and triumphant course. From 40,000 in 1891 the number of its members rose to 100,000 in 1901, to 243,000 in 1911, and to 468,000 in 1921.<sup>2</sup> Some of the most important Hindu personalities, politicians and Maharajahs, belonged to it. Its spontaneous and impassioned success in contrast to the slight reverberations of Keshab's Brahmo Samaj, shows the degree to which Dayananda's stern teachings corresponded to the thought of his country and to the first stirrings of Indian nationalism, to which he contributed.

It may perhaps be useful to remind Europe of the reasons at the bottom of this national awakening, now in full flood.

Westernisation was going too far, and was not always revealed by its best side. Intellectually

\* This is all the more striking since it was in Madras that Vivekananda found his most ardent and best organised disciples.

<sup>2</sup> Of whom 223,000 are in the Punjab and Delhi, 203,000 in the United Provinces, 23,000 in Kashmir, 4,500 in Behar. In short it is the expression of Northern India and one of its most energetic elements.

it had become rather a frivolous attitude of mind, which did away with the need for independence of thought, and transplanted young intelligences from their proper environment, teaching them to despise the genius of their race. The instinct for self-preservation revolted. Dayananda's generation had watched, as he had done, not without anxiety, suffering, and irritation, the gradual infiltration into the veins of India of superficial European rationalism on the one hand, whose romantic arrogance understood nothing of the depths of the Indian spirit, and on the other hand, of a Christianity, which when it entered, fatally life fulfilled only too well Christ's prophecy that "he had come to bring division between father and son."

It is certainly not for us to depreciate Christian influences. I am a Catholic by birth, and as such have known the taste of Christ's blood and enjoyed the storehouse of profound life, revealed in the books and in the lives of great Christians, although I am outside all exclusive forms of church and religion. Hence I do not dream of subordinating such a faith to any other faith whatsoever; when the soul had reached a certain pitch—*acumen mentis*—it can go no further. Unfortunately the religion of one country does not always work upon alien races through its best elements. Too often questions of human pride are intermingled with the desire for earthly conquest, and, provided victory is attained, the view

'To use the phrase of Richard de Saint-Victor and Western mystics to François de Sales (cf. Jean Briend - *The Mysticism of the Saints*)

is too often held that the end justifies the means I will go further and say that, even in its highest presentation, it is very rare that one religion takes possession of the spirit of another race in its deepest essence at the final pitch of the soul, of which I have just spoken. It does so rather by aspects, very significant no doubt, but second in importance. Those of us, who have pored on the wonderful system of Christian metaphysics and sounded their depths, know what infinite spaces they offer to the soaring wings of the spirit and that the Divine Cosmos they present of Being and the Love cleaving to Him, is no less vast or less sublime than the conception of the Vedāntic Infinite. But if a Keshab caught glimpse of this, a Keshab was an exception among his people, and it would seem that Christianity very rarely manifested to Hindus under this aspect. It is presented to them rather as a code of ethics, of practical action, as love in action, such a term is permissible, and though this is a very important aspect, it is not the greatest.<sup>1</sup> It is a remarkable fact that the most notable conversions have taken place in the ranks of active and energetic personalities rather than in those of deep spiritual contemplation, of men capable of heroic flights of soul.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> I myself independently and intuitively belong to the side of Salvean Theocentrism, as represented by M. Henri Brémond in a recent polemic against the religious moralism or anti-mysticism of M. l'Abbé Vincent. (*Cf. op. cit.*, Vol. I, pp. 26-47)

<sup>2</sup> The Sādhu Sundar Singh, whose name is well-known in Europe among Protestants, is a good example. A Punjab Sikh, the son of a Sardar and brother of a commander in the army, this sainted

Whether this is true or not, and it provides an ample theme for discussion, it is a historic fact that when Dayananda's mind was in process of being formed, the highest religious spirit of India had been so weakened that the religious spirit of Europe threatened to extinguish its feeble flame without the satisfaction of substituting its own. The Brahmo Samaj was troubled by it, but was itself willy nilly stamped with Western Christianity. Ram Mohun Roy's starting point had been Protestant Unitarianism. Devendranath, although he denied it, had not the strength to prevent its intrusion into the Samaj, when he yielded the ascendancy to Keshab, already three parts given over to it. As early as 1850 one of Keshab's critics<sup>1</sup> could say that "those who believe in him have lost the name of theists, because they lean more and more towards Christianity." However precisely the position of the third Brahmo Samaj (the Sadharan Brahmo Samaj) detached from Keshab) had been defined as against Indian Christianity, Indian public opinion could feel no confidence in a church undermined by two successive schisms within the space of half a century, and threatened, as we have seen, during the next half century with complete absorption in Christianity.

<sup>1</sup> *religions of India*, he had never penetrated to the core of their thought.  
<sup>2</sup> *C/ Frank Jallington The Brahmo and the Arya in their relation to Christianity, 1901*

The enthusiastic reception accorded to the thunderous champion of the Vedas, a Vohst belonging to a great race and penetrated with the sacred writings of ancient India and with the heroic spirit, is then easily explained. He also hurled the defiance of India against her invaders Dayananda declared war on Christianity and his heavy massive sword cleft it assunder with scant reference to the scope or exactitude of his blows. He put it to the test of a vengeful, unjust and injurious criticism, which fastened upon each separate verse of the Bible and was blind and deaf to its real, its religious and even its literal meaning (for he read the Bible in a Hindi translation and in a hurry!). His slashing commentaries,<sup>1</sup> reminiscent of Voltaire and his *Dictionnaire Philosophique*, have unfortunately remained the arsenal for the spiteful anti-Christianity of certain modern Hindus.<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, as Glasenapp rightly remarks, they are of paramount interest for European Christianity, which ought to know what is the image of itself as presented by its Asiatic adversaries.

Dayananda had no greater regard for the Koran and the Purānas, and trampled underfoot the body of Brahmin orthodoxy. He had no pity for any of his fellow countrymen, past or present, who had contributed in any way to the thousand-year

decadence of India, at one time the mistress of the world'. He was a ruthless critic of all who, according to him, had falsified or profaned the true Vedic religion.' He was a Luther fighting against his own misled and misguided Church, of Rome; and his first care was to throw open the wells of the holy books, so that for the first time his people could come to them and drink for themselves. He translated and wrote commentaries on the Vedas in the vernacular—it was in truth an epoch-making date for India when a Brahmin

text. His translation, which he had no time to revise, is always preceded by a grammatical and etymological analysis of each verse, followed by a commentary explaining the general sense.

not only acknowledged that all human beings have the right to know the Vedas, whose study had been previously prohibited by orthodox Brahmins, but insisted that their study and propagation was the duty of every Arya.<sup>1</sup>

It is true that his translation was an inter-p

Article III of the Ten Principles of Lahore (1877) "The Vedas are the book of true knowledge. The first duty of every Arya is to learn them and to teach them." By a strange accident Dayananda concluded a polemic dispute lasting several years (1879-1881) with a Western community, destined for a great work, the Theosophical Society, on the basis of his vindication of the Vedas against

in this way the vast and liberal system of Hindu metaphysics

in its favour. "An Indo-European Influence, the Theosophical Society," (*Revue de l'Inde*, No. 1, Paris) and a brilliant, comprehensive, and malicious chanter



tation, and that there is much to criticise with regard to accuracy, as well as with regard to the rigidity of the dogmas and principles he drew from the text, the absolute infallibility claimed for the one book, which according to him had emanated direct from the "pre-human" or super-human Divinity, his denials from which there was no appeal, his unplaceable condemnations, his theism of action, his credo of battle, and finally his national God.

But in default of outpourings of the heart and the calm sun of the spirit, bathing the nations of

But not his passionate loyalty which remains proof

universal pretensions  
 "The well-being of humanity as a whole ought to be the  
 object of the game" (Principles of the Arya Samaj)

men and their Gods in its effulgence,—in default of the warm poetry radiating from the entire being of a Ramakrishna or the grandiose poetic style of a Vivekananda, Dayananda transfused into the languid body of India his own formidable energy, his certainty, his lion's blood. His words rang with heroic power. He reminded the secular passivity of a people, too prone to bow to fate, that the soul is free and that action is the generator of destiny.' He set the example of a complete clearance of all the encumbering growth of privilege and prejudice by a series of hatchet

humanity as a whole, when he started by decreeing that they contained, as Aurobindo Ghose says, "a plenary revelation of religious, ethical and scientific truth. Its religious teaching is monotheistic and the Vedic gods are different descriptive names of the one Deity, they are at the same time indications of His powers as we see them working in Nature, and by a true understanding of the sense of the Vedas we could arrive at all the scientific truths which have been discovered by modern research" ("The Secret of the Veda" *Arya*, November, 1914, Pondicherry).

blows. If his metaphysics were dry and obscure,

fact he went further than the Brahmo Samaj, and even further than the Ramakrishna Mission ren-

tures to-day.

His creation, the Arya Samaj, postulates in principle equal justice for all men and all nations, together with equality of the sexes. It repudiates a hereditary caste system, and only recognizes professions or guilds, suitable to the complementary aptitudes of men in society; religion was to have no part in these divisions, but only the service of the state, which assesses the tasks to be performed. The state alone, if it considers it for the good of the community, can raise or degrade a man from one caste to another by way of reward or punishment. Dayananda wished every man to have the opportunity to acquire as much knowledge as would enable him to raise himself in the social scale as high as he was able. Above all he would not tolerate the abominable injustice of the existence of untouchables, and nobody has been a more ardent champion of their

interable. The Creation, the essential exercise of Divine  
 another body . . . etc.

outraged rights. They were admitted to Arya Samaj on a basis of equality; for the Aryas are not a caste. "The Aryas are all men of superior principles; and the Dasyus are they who lead a life of wickedness and sin."

Dayananda was no less generous and no less bold in his crusade to improve the condition of women, a deplorable one in India. He revolted against the abuses from which they suffered, calling that in the heroic age they occupied the home and in society a position at least equal to men. They ought to have equal education according to him, and supreme control of 'marriage' over household matters including the finances. Dayananda in fact claimed equal rights in marriage for men and women, and though he regarded marriage as indissoluble, he admitted the remarriage of widows, and went so far as to envisage a temporary union for women as well as for men for the purpose of having children, if none had resulted from marriage.

Lastly the Arya Samaj, whose eighth principle was "to diffuse knowledge and dissipate ignorance," has played a great part in the education of

<sup>1</sup> In marriage the minimum age was to be sixteen for girls and twenty-five for boys. Dayananda was resolutely opposed to infant marriage.

<sup>2</sup> This was our information ten years ago at the date of the publication of Lajpat Rai's book. From that date the *Y* continued to expand.

Anglo-Vedic College of Lahore and the Gurukul of Kangri, national bulwarks of Hindu education, which seek to resuscitate the energies of the race and to use at the same time the intellectual and technical conquests of the West.

To these let us add philanthropic activities, such as orphanages, workshops for boys and girls, homes for widows, and great works of social service at the time of public calamities, epidemics, famine, etc., and it is obvious that the Arya Samaj is the rival of the future Ramakrishna Mission.

I have said enough about this rough Sanyāsini with the soul of a leader, to show how great an uplifter of the peoples he was—in fact the most vigorous force of the immediate and present action in India at the moment of the rebirth and re-awakening of the national consciousness. His

and literary culture, vivified by moral energy. There is also a great college for girls in the Punjab, where feminine subjects and domestic economy are united to intellectual studies. The

Virshanda and first activities of by the from Virshanda. In 1897 part against famine against plague.

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Lastly the Arya Samaj, whose eighth principle was "to diffuse knowledge and dissipate ignorance," has played a great part in the education of India. Especially in the Punjab and the United Provinces it has founded a host of schools for girls and boys. Their laborious hives are grouped round two model establishments:<sup>2</sup> the Dayananda

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<sup>2</sup> This was our information ten years ago the publication of Lajpat Rai's book. For the educational movement has probably

exercised for more than forty years in the State of Travancore over some million faithful souls (he has just

Such then were the great shepherds of the people, the king-pastors of India, at the moment when the star of Ramakrishna appeared in cloudless glory above the mountains. Naturally he could not have known the first of these four men, the forerunner, Ram Mohan

## RAMAKRISHNA AND THE GREAT SHEPHERDS OF INDIA

Arya Samaj, whether he wanted it or not, prepared the way in 1843 for the revival of Hinduism. He was one of the least ardent projects of its construction and of political organisation. It is that it was he who kept the Vigil; but his strength was also his weakness. His purpose and his action and its object his nation. For a project lacking the vision of wider horizons the achievement of the action and the creation of the nation might perhaps be enough. But not in India - before her wall still be the universe.

He forbade it in public, he always claimed to be non-political and non-anti-British. But the British Government judged differently. The Arya Samaj found itself ~~compelled~~ moved by the attitude of its members.



The story of his visit to the imposing Devendranath Tagore, as told by himself, is a tribute of comedy, wherein the critical humour and the disrespectful respect of the "little brother" towards the great pontiff, the "King Janaka," have free play.

"Is it possible," a questioner asked him one day, "to reconcile the world and God? What do you think of Mahatma Devendranath Tagore?" Ramakrishna repeated softly, "Devendranath Tagore . . . Devendranath . . . Devendra. . . —and he bowed several times. Then he said

"Do you know what he is? Once upon a time there was a man, whose custom it was to celebrate the feast of Durgā Puja with great pomp. Goats were sacrificed from morning till night. After some years the sacrifice lost its brilliancy. Somebody asked the man why it was so greatly reduced, and the man replied, 'I have lost my teeth now.'"

"And so," continued the irreverent story-teller, "it is quite natural that Devendranath should practise meditation at his advanced age."

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any  
so  
with the words "There is a madman of God!"

Roy, but he knew the other three personally. He first visited them, urged by that overwhelming thirst for God, which made him always ask himself: "Are there no more of His wells, where these have found and from which I have drunk?" But his practised eye judged them at sight. His critical faculties were never abated. As he leant over them to taste them with his thirsty devotion, he often laughed mischievously and rose with the words that his own were better. He was not the man to be dazzled by outward show, glory or eloquence. His veiled eyes did not blink unless the light he sought, the face of God Himself, shone from the depths. They could penetrate through the walls of the body as through a window-pane and searched the very heart with eager curiosity. But what they found there sometimes provoked a sudden quiet outburst of hilarity, untinged with malice, from this indirect visitor.

died in 1928) His doctrine was impregnated with the monist metaphysics of Sankara, but tended to practical action showing very marked differences from Bengal mysticism, whose Bhakti effusions filled him with mistrust. He preached, if one may say so, a Jñāna of action, a great intellectual religion, having a very lively sense of the people and their social needs. It has greatly contributed to the uplifting of the oppressed classes in Southern India and its activities have in a measure been allied to those of Gandhi. (Cf. Articles by his disciple, P. Natarajan, in *The Sufi Quarterly*, Geneva, December, 1923 and the following months)

\* The question is of the mysterious word for the Almighty Being (and which is no Vedic OM relegated to an inferior place that vibrates through the Universe—whence is derived the "M" in the old language of Greco-Roman found under rather a different name, the *Maîtreya* Upanishad)

longed to the world and yet he attained the highest realizations. You are in the world, but your mind rests on the heights of God. Tell me something of Him!"

Devendranath recited to him some beautiful passages from the Veda,<sup>1</sup> and the interview proceeded on a tone of familiar courtesy. Devendranath was much struck by the fire in the eyes of his visitor, and he invited Ramakrishna to a feast for the next day. But he begged him to "cover his body a little," if he wished to be present for the little pilgrim had not put himself to the trouble of dressing up. Ramakrishna replied with wicked good fellowship that he could not be depended upon; he was as he was, and would come as he was. So they parted very good friends. But early the next morning a very polite note came from the great aristocrat, begging him not to put himself to any trouble. And that was the end. With one caressing stroke of the paw aristocracy remained aloof, secure in its paradise of idealism. Dayananda was summoned up, judged and condemned as of less worth still. It must be admitted that when the two men met at the end of 1873, the Arya Samaj had not yet been founded and the reformer was still in the midst of his

"This universe is to be likened to a candleabra. And each one of us is a bulb. If we do not burn, the whole candleabra becomes dark. God has created man to celebrate His glory.  
In Sanskrit account Ramakrishna made this naive reflection: "It is strange! While I was meditating in the Pachavati (the grove of Dakshinewar), I also saw an image like a candleabra. Devendranath must really be a very profound man!"

He paused . . . "But," he added, bowing once more, "he is undoubtedly a very illustrious man."

Then he recounted his visit :

"At first when I saw him, I thought him rather proud. Oh! it was natural! He was overwhelmed by so many good things—nobility, prestige, riches . . . Suddenly I found myself in the state when I can see through a man. Then I consider the greatest, the richest, the most learned men as straw, if I do not see God. . . And a laugh escaped me . . . for I discovered that this man at the same time enjoyed the world and led a religious life. He had many children, all young. So in spite of his being a great Jñānin, he had to reconcile himself to the world. I said to him, 'You are the King Janaka of our day.' He be-

"Devendranath seemed to me to be concentrated upon his own ego, but why should he not have been so concentrated when he enjoyed so much knowledge, renown, riches and unanimous respect? But I discovered that Yoga and Ithoga (material enjoyment) can . . ."

his chest. Devendranath complied without showing much astonishment. The colour of the skin was scarlet, and Ramakrishna examined it. This persistent redness of the breast is a peculiar sign of the practice of certain Yoga. Ramakrishna never omitted to examine the breast of his breathing capacity, and the soundness of before allowing or forbidding them to of great concentration

disciples still speak of Keshab with sympathetic regard, and thank him for the homage he yielded to the Paramahansa. But some of Keshab's disciples cannot forgive Ramakrishna for the ascendency, real or apparent, he exercised over their master; hence in order to deny that any such influence could have existed, they have reverted to the plan of raising between them insurmountable barriers of thought; they scornfully misrepresent Ramakrishna's true worth, and their harmful spite is also directed against the man who preached his Gospel, and made it victorious—Vivekananda.

But having read certain beautiful and fresh pages of Keshab, wherein the ideas and actions of Vivekananda are distinctly foreshadowed, I can well understand that the Brahmos chafe under the silence and oblivion into which the Ramakrishna Mission has allowed them to fall. So far as lies in my power, I shall try to amend this injustice; for I believe it to be unwitting. But certain Brahmos could not worse uphold Keshab's memory than by confining him within their own narrow limits and by putting in the shade the disinterested affection felt by Keshab for Ramakrishna. In the whole of Keshab's life, so worthy

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 pling Chapter  
 V. "Concerning Vivekananda, the informant of Max Müller," which does not scruple to join forces with some Anglo-American clergymen, harassed by the thunderous religious polemics of the great Swami)

career. When Ramakrishna examined him, he found in him "a little power," by which he meant, "real contact with the Divine." But the tortured and torturing character, the bellicose athleticism of the champion of the Vedas, his feverish insistence that he alone was in the right, and therefore had the right to impose his will, were all blots on his mission in Ramakrishna's eyes. He saw him day and night disputing concerning the Scriptures, twisting their meaning, and striving at all costs to found a new sect. But such preoccupation with personal and worldly success sullied the true love of God, and so he turned away from Dayananda.

His relations with Keshab Chunder Sen were of quite a different order. They were intimate, affectionate and lasting.

Before speaking of them I must express regret that the disciples of the two masters have left us such prejudiced accounts. Each side has been at considerable pains to "vassalise" the other man of God in favour of its own saint. Ramakrishna's

believed in on the ground of faith in the infallible Vedas.  
cannot explain this apparent contradiction.

religious men of India, never took a Guru, an intermediary between himself and the Divinity,—so that nobody has the right to say that he was a disciple of Ramakrishna, as is claimed by the Ramakrishnites—his generous spirit was ever ready to appreciate greatness, and his love of truth was too pure for vanity to have any part in it. Hence this teacher was ever ready to learn, and said of himself, "I am a born disciple . . . all objects are my masters. I learn from everything." How then can he have failed to learn from the Man of God?

During the early months of 1875 Keshab Daksineswar Ramakrishna went to visit him with the words.

"Ishah" (Niketya) But at his apartment, the face, was lined by the tender sun of the West, the depths of his soul remained Indian. Ramakrishna watching him as he meditated, was not mistaken. "On the platform of the Brahmo Samaj several people were kneeling," he

of respect and affection, there is nothing more deservedly dear to us than the attitude of respect and affection adopted from the first by this great man at the height of his fame and climax of his thought, and maintained until the end, towards the Little Poor Man of Dakshineswar, then either obscure or misrepresented. The more the Brahmins attempt, their pride hurt by the familiarities of the "madman of God" with the prince of intellectuals, to extract from the writings of Keshab proud denunciations of disordered ecstasies, such as they attribute to Ramakrishna, the more striking is the contrast of Keshab's actual relations to Ramakrishna.

If it is true that Keshab, unlike most of the

Sannyas further in Chapter III, Monzoonkar quotes Keshab as saying "For a hundred times to the Yogi, if he abandons everything for the love of Yogi! . . . It is a sin to abandon those whom God has given us to cherish." He claims to find in these words Ramakrishna as having neglected his wife. But it is untrue to say that he did not love his wife, he knew how to love her, she was a source of joy to him, shown how she loved him, and that he did not neglect them, they had all children dependent on him.



everywhere of Ramakrishna, in his sermons, and in his writings for journals and reviews, both in English and in the native languages. His own fame was put at Ramakrishna's disposal, and it was through Keshab that his reputation, which until then had, with a few near exceptions, not reached the popular religious masses, came to be known in a short time within the intellectual middle class circles of Bengal and beyond.

The modesty shown by the noble Keshab, rich in illustrious chief of the Brahmo Samaj, rich in learning and prestige, in bowing down before this unknown man, ignorant of book-learning and of Sanskrit, who could hardly read and who wrote with difficulty, is truly admirable. But Ramakrishna's jettison confounded him and he sat at his feet as a disciple.

But this is not to say that Keshab was the disciple of Ramakrishna, as is claimed by some over-zealous followers of the latter. It is not true that any one of his essential ideas was derived from him,\* for they were already formed when he met Ramakrishna for the first time. We have seen that after 1862 he began to conceive of the harmony of religions and their original unity. He said in 1863: "All truths are common to all, for all are of God. Truth is no more European than Asiatic, no more yours than mine." In 1864 in the course of a lecture on the *Prayer* (here), he avowed all religions as a vast assemblage, wherein each one, while keeping its distinctive character, the force of its inspiration,

\* See Note II at the end of the volume *Prayer*.

I have a great respect for you, and I am sure that you will be able to do what I ask."

Perceiving the truth in what he said, Hanakrishna went to the temple of Lord Venkateswara at Tirumala. He then placed by him a letter in which he had written a full account of what he had seen, and also a list of the names of the persons who had been with him at the time of his discovery. But he had not felt it wise to lay before him a full statement of his feelings regarding the One and Only God. His inner soul was agitated even as the unquiet ocean, and it struck Keshava sorely. He charged his disciples to observe. After a short time he had no doubt that he was dealing with an exceptional personality, and at his turn went to seek it out. They became friends. He invited Hanakrishna to the court of his Brahmin name, and used to come to take him from his temple for excursions on the Ganges, and since his generous soul was obliged to share his discoveries with others, he spoke

genius of heart, who communicated to those coming into contact with him the warm breath of the Goddess and the shelter of Her beautiful arms, was to Keshab, and how deeply he must have felt its impact, for he too was a Bhakta, a believer through love!

"The sweet, simple, charming and childlike nature of Ramakrishna coloured the Yoga of Keshab and his immaculate conception of religion," wrote Churniyil Sarmā, one of his biographers.

And one of the missionaries of Keshab's church, Babu Gurish Chandra Sen, wrote

"It was from Ramakrishna that Keshab received the idea of invoking God by the sweet name of Mother with the simplicity of a child."

Only the last quotation needs comment, for we have shown that Keshab did not wait for Ramakrishna before invoking the Mother. Ramakrishna, however, brought him a renewal of love

exaggerated the influence of Ramakrishna on Keshab's thought. Those who try to prove too much lay themselves open to censure. To write like Churniyil Sarmā that "The worship of God as Mother was due to Ramakrishna," is a contradiction of the facts. It is quite enough to say that Ramakrishna's example developed it in the Hrasvo Samy. The Hrasvo cult was rather hard on the shadow of Ramakrishna, to use a simile of Hrasvo Gurish Chandra Sen, "solidified it."

the register of its voice united to praise God Father and Man the Brother in one univ anthem. On the other hand, it is false to cl that Keshab needed Ramakrishna's help to an at his conception of the Mother—a concept common to all ages in India, as that of the Fat in the West. Ramakrishna did not create The hymns of Ramprasad, stored within l memory, sing Her in all keys. The idea of Go maternity had been incorporated in the Brah Samaj during the pontificate of Devendranath Keshab's disciples have no difficulty in citing n vocations to the Mother all through the work t their master.'

Undoubtedly the twin ideas of the Divine Mother and the brotherhood of Her worshippers were beautiful ones, whatever the forms of their ritual and means of expression, and, as ideas, they were already possessed by Keshab and revivified by his sincere faith. But it was another thing to find them alive and vital in a Ramakrishna! The Little Poor Man was not troubled by theories; he simply was. He was the communion of the Gods with believers; he was the Mother and Her lover; he saw Her; She was seen through him; She could be touched. What a discovery this

'1862. when Keshab was still the minister of the Ad Brahmo Samaj of Devendranath, a hymn was sung "Sitting on the knees of the Mother."

1866 Manual of the Brahmo Samaj. "O Divine Mother, and me by Thy mercy. O Mother, come, draw near!"

1875 "Happy am I! I have been merged in the heart of the Mother, I am now among Her children; the Mother unces with Her children."

(But before this last date the meeting of Keshab and Krishna had taken place Cf B Mozumdar, op cit. Chapter III)

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‘Promothe Toll Sen says that he communed daily with God  
‘Let prayer be your chief preoccupation’. Pray ardently  
and without ceasing alone and together let it be the alpha

by the Ramakrishnaites in support of their thesis, certainly exaggerated the influence of Ramakrishna on Chatterjee. (Bhadra 'Formal) Those who try to prove too much lay on too suspicion. To write like Chatterjee 'The work' of God as Mother was due to a of the facts. It is quite an example developed in its cult was rather hard to use a simile of Bhagvan.

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(But before this  
Ramakrishna had  
Chapter III)

"the minister of the A  
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Hm.' I thought. 'They will now go into the inner world and stay a long time.' Hardly had a few minutes passed when they all opened their eyes. I was astonished. Can anyone find Him after so slight a meditation? After it was all over, when we were alone, I spoke to Keshab about it: 'I watched all your congregation community with their eyes shut. Do you know what it reminded me of? Sometimes at Dakshineswar I have seen under the trees a flock of monkeys sitting, still and looking the very picture of innocence. . . . They were thinking and planning their campaign of robbing certain gardens of fruits, roots, and other edibles. . . in a few moments. The communing that your followers did with God to-day is no more serious!'

In a ritual hymn of the Brahma Samaj this verse occurs:

"Think of Him and worship Him at every instant of the day!"

Ramakrishna stopped the singer, and said. "You should alter the verse into 'Pray to Him and worship Him only twice a day'. Say what you really do. Why tell fibs to the Infinite?"

The Brahma Samaj of Keshab, while it extolled faith, did so in a purposely stilted, abstract and solemn tone, reminiscent of the Anglican. It seemed to be always on guard against any suspicion of idolatry. Ramakrishna took a mis-

'There is a type of Brahma prayer, quoted in The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna  
(Um! Thou art our Father. Give us knowledge! The not destroy us?  
(Um! Brahman! Truth! Knowledge! Justice! He is the Good! He is the One!





"You wish to be strict and partial . . . For myself I have a burning desire to worship the Lord in as many ways as I can; nevertheless my heart's desire has never been satisfied. I long to worship with offerings of flowers and fruits, to repeat His holy name in solitude, to meditate upon Him, to sing His hymns, to dance in the joy of the Lord' . . . Those who believe that God is without form attain Him just as well as those who believe He has form. The only two essentials are faith and self-surrender . . ."

I can copy the colourless words, but I cannot communicate the real presence, the radiance of person, the tone of voice, the look in the eyes and the captivating smile. Nobody who came in contact with them could resist them. It was above all his living certitude that impressed the on-lookers, for with him words were not, as with others, a loose and ornamental robe, hiding as much as they claimed to reveal of the unfathomable depths of life, with him the majority even of blossomed, and God, who for the majority even of religious men is a frame of thought drawing an impenetrable veil across "the Unknown Master-piece," was to be seen in him; for as he spoke he lost himself in God, like a bathor who dives and reappears dripping after a moment, bringing with him the smell of seaweed, the taste of the salt of the Ocean. Who can rid himself of its tang? The scientific spirit of the West can indeed analyse it. But whatever its elements, its synthetic reality was never in doubt. The

<sup>1</sup> Allusion to a celebrated novel of the great French writer, Balzac.

greatest sceptic can touch the diver as he returns from the depths of the Dream, and catch some reflection of submarine flora in his eyes. Keshab and several of his disciples were intoxicated with it.

The strange dialogues of this Indian Plato, delivered on Keshab's yacht as it went up and down the Ganges, deserve to be read. Their narrator, afterwards Ramakrishna's evangelist, was the first to be astonished that such a meeting could have come about between such opposite types of mind. What common ground could there be between the man of God and the man of the world, the great intellectual, the Anglomaniac Keshab, whose reason condemned the God? Keshab's disciples pressed round the two sages at the port-hole of the cabin, like a swarm of flies. And as the honey of his words began to flow from Ramakrishna's lips, the flies were drowned in it.

on the faces surrounding him, and described their moral character one by one, as delineated in their features, first the eyes, then the forehead, the nose, the teeth, and the ears, for they formed a language to which he had the key. As he spoke with his sweet and attractive stammer he came to the subject of the Narakara Brahman, the formless

God.

"He repeated the word Narakara two or three times and then quietly passed into Samadhi as the diver slips into the fathomless deep. . . . We watched him intently. The whole body relaxed and then became slightly rigid. There was no twitching of the muscles or nerves, no movement of any limb. Both his hands lay in his lap with the fingers lightly interlocked. The sitting posture of the body was easy but absolutely motionless. The face was slightly tilted up and in repose. The eyes were nearly but not wholly closed. The eyeballs were not turned up or otherwise deflected, but they were fixed. . . . The lips were parted in a beatific and indescribable smile, disclosing the gleam of the white teeth. There was something in that wonderful smile which no photograph was ever able to reproduce." "It would be the cinema

these people?' And then he vigorously slapped the top of his head several times, and cried out, 'Go down, go down!' . . . . The Paramahansa became fully conscious and sang in a pleasant voice (a hymn of Kâh)."

He sang the identity of the Divine Mother with the Absolute. He sang the joy of the flying kite of the soul, launched by the Mother while She keeps it attached to Her by the string of Illusion.'

"The world is the Mother's plaything. It is Her pleasure to let slip from Illusion one or two flying kites among the thousands. It is Her sport. She says to the human soul in confidence with a wink of the eye: 'Go and live in the world until I tell you to do something else! . . . .'"

And in imitation of Her he turned to the disciples of Keshab with an indulgent irony that made him laugh

"You are in the world. Stay there! It is not for you to abandon it. You are very well as you are, pure gold and alloy, sugar and treacle. . . . We sometimes play a game in which one must gain seventeen points to win. I have passed the limit and I have lost. But you clever people, who have not won enough points, can still continue to play. . . . In truth it matters little if you live

again and again with variations in the poetic and musical folk lore of Bengal from the fifteenth century onwards.

in the family or in the world, so long as you do not lose contact with God."

And it was in the course of these monologues, wherein observation and ecstasy, mocking common sense and highest speculation were so wonderfully blended, that the Paramahansa produced his beautiful parables, quoted above, of the Divine Tank with several ghats and of Kâli, the Spider. He had too keen a sense of reality, he saw too clearly to the very bottom of his listeners, to imagine that he could raise them to the heights of his own liberated soul. He measured their wisdom and their capability, but he asked for the whole of that! Above all he communicated to Keshab and his disciples the spirit of life, the creative breath, coupled with a wide and intellectual tolerance, which recognised the truth in quite diverse points of view, previously considered by them to be irreconcilable. He freed their intellectual limbs, petrified within the groove of reason, and made them supple. He tore them from their abstract discussions "Live, love and create!" And blood again flowed through their veins.

"To create is to be like God," he said to Keshab, who was then spending himself in endless and fruitless polemics. "When you are filled with the essence of all existence then whatever you say becomes true. Poets have praised virtue and truth, has that made their readers virtuous and truthful? When a selfless person lives amongst us his deeds become the very heart-beat of virtue. Whatever he does to others improves even their meanest dreams. Whatever he touches becomes true and pure. He

becomes the father of reality.<sup>4</sup> What he creates never flounders in time. This is what I expect you to do. Silence the dogs of invectives! Let the elephant of Being trumpet its blessings on all! You have that power, will you use it? Or, shall you squander this lifetime by abusing people?"

Keshab listened to his advice and took deep root in this warm living earth, bathed in the sap emanating from the Universal Being. Ramakrishna made him feel that no particle of this sap was ever lost, even in the most humble plant of human thought. His mind was sympathetically reopened to all other forms of faith, even to certain outward practices, which he had avoided. He was to be seen invoking by their names Shiva, Shakti, Sarasvati, Lakshmi, Hari, identifying God's attributes with them. For two years he was absorbed in each of the great religious types, the heroic incarnations of the Spirit: Jesus, Buddha, Chaitanya, each representing one side of the Great Mirror. He sought to assimilate them each in turn, so that through their synthesis he might realise the universal ideal. During his last illness he was especially drawn to that form of

our propaganda  
"How then can  
replied: "Our  
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y our lives and

our examples, not by our words, which are a very inadequate vehicle. Spiritual experiences are deeper than thought itself. By the very fact that we live, spiritual experience will overflow. But if you deliberately set yourself to share your spiritual experience with another, you raise an intellectual barrier between you." (Discussion at the Council of the Federation of International Fellowship, Satyagraha Ashram, Sabarmati, January 15, 1923).

<sup>4</sup> Mukerji.

Bhakti most familiar to Ramakrishna—a passionate love of the Mother. Keshab's disciples told Ramakrishna, when he came to see him during his last days on earth, that "a great change had taken place." "Often we find him talking to the Divine Mother, waiting for Her and weeping." And Ramakrishna, enraptured by this news, fell into an ecstasy. "There is nothing more touching in the whole account of this supreme interview" than the appearance of the dying Keshab, shaken by a mortal cough holding on to the walls, supporting himself by the furniture, coming to cast himself at the feet of Ramakrishna. The latter was still half plunged in ecstasy, and was talking to himself. Keshab was silent, drinking in the mysterious words that seemed to come from the Mother herself. They explained to him with ruthlessness but consoling tranquility the deep meaning of his sufferings and his approaching death. "With what deep insight Ramakrishna understood the hidden confusion of this life of faith and rest-  
less love!"

"You are ill," he said sweetly. "There is a profound meaning in that. Through your body have passed many deep waves of devotion seeking for the Lord. Your illness bears witness to these emotions. It is impossible to tell what damage they do to the organism at the time they are produced. A boat passes along the Ganges without attracting attention. But some time afterwards a great wave, displaced by its passage, dashes against the bank and washes away part of it. When the fire of the Divine Vision enters the frail house of the body, it first burns the passions, then the false ego, and at last it consumes everything. . . . You have not yet reached the end."

He then invoked the gracious parable of the Divine gardener digging round the roots of a precious rose tree, so that it might drink the night dew.<sup>1</sup>

and into the sufferings of the sick man. Rama-

<sup>1</sup> "The gardener knows how to treat the common rose, and how to treat the rose of Bassora. He loosens the earth round her roots, so that she may benefit from the night dew. The dew gives strength and freshness to the rose. It is even so with you. The Divine Gardener knows how to treat you. He digs round you right down to the roots, so that His dew may fall upon you, that you may become purer and your work greater and more enduring." (*The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, Vol. I, section V, chapter II.)



Krishna did not adopt a solemn tone until Keshab, exhausted, was about to leave him. Then he suggested to the dying man that he ought not to live so much in the inner room with the women and children, but alone with God.

And it is said that in his death agony, Keshab's last words were: "Mother! . . . Mother!

It is so easy to understand how this great idealist, who believed in God, Reason, Goodness, Justice and Truth, should have discovered during these tragic days that he was too far away from the High God, the Unattainable God, and that he needed to draw near to Him and to touch Him with the dust of Ramakrishna's feet, to see Him and hear Him through Ramakrishna, and find refreshment for his fever. Such is an expression of universal experience. But it is just this for which some of Keshab's proud disciples cannot forgive Ramakrishna. On the other hand, I must beg the Ramakrishnites not to make too much of it, but rather let them follow the example of their

The repercussion of some of Ramakrishna's words, spoken during his last interview with Keshab, on the latter's last thoughts, but, I think, never before been noticed.

Ramakrishna spoke to him for a long time about the Mother and said "She watches over her children. She knows how to obtain true freedom and knowledge for them. The child knows nothing. Its Mother knows everything. All is ordered according to Her will. You fulfil Your own will, O Divine Mother, and accomplish Your own work. The foolish man says. "It is I who have accomplished." "The foolish man says. "It is I who have accomplished."

Moreover, when Keshab in the midst of his own sufferings was consoling his real, his mortal mother, who had given him life, he said "The Supreme Mother sends everything for my good. She plays with me," turning sometimes to one side, sometimes to the other.



anybody else's to bring them into line in people's estimation with the best thought of India, which the first influx of the scientific knowledge of the West, badly assimilated, had threatened to abe-

nate.

One example will suffice. His great disciple, Vivekananda, came from the ranks of the Brahmno Samaj and from the most bigoted, at least for a time, of iconoclasts in the name of Western reason against Hindu tradition, which later he learnt to respect and defend. The true thought of the West has lost nothing through this Hindu awakening. The thought of the East is now independent, and henceforth union can be effected between equal and free personalities, instead of the one being subjugated by the other, and one of the two civilisations being assimilated by the other.

## VIII

### THE CALL OF THE DISCIPLES

It is easy to see what India gained from the meeting of Ramakrishna and the Brahmo Samaj. His own gain is less obvious, but no less definite. For the first time he found himself brought into personal contact with the educated middle class of his country, and through them with the pioneers of progress and Western ideas. He had previously known practically nothing of their mentality.

He was not a man to react like a strict and narrow devotee, who hastens to put up the shutters of his cell. On the contrary he flung them wide open. He was too human, too insatiably curious, too greedy for the fruit of the tree of life not to taste these new fruits to the full. His long searching glance insinuated itself, like a creeper through the chinks of the house, and studied all the different habitations of the same Host, and studied all the different spirits dwelling therein, and in order to understand them he identified himself with them. He studied their limitations (as well as their significance) and proportioned to each nature its own portion of life and individual duty. He never dreamed of imposing either vision or action alien to his proper nature on any man. He, to whom association both then and always, so far as he personally concerned, was the first and last word of truth, discovered that most men would

have none of it, and he was neither astonished nor saddened by the discovery. The differences men hedges, seemed to him nothing but bushes all flowering in the same field and giving variety to the scene.' He loved them all. He could see the goal and the path assigned to each one of them, and pointed out to each the road he was to follow. When he spoke to an individual, one of the things most astonishing to the onlookers was the way he instantaneously adopted just the individual's particular turn of phrase and method of expressing his thoughts. This was not mere versatility. His spirit kept firm control of the steering wheel, and if he led men to another point of the bank, it was always the bank of God. He helped them unawares to land by their own power. Because he believed that all nature was of God, he felt that it was his duty to guide each nature along its own lines so that it might attain its fullest development. The realisation that he possessed this gift of spiritual guidance, came upon him without his own volition. A Western proverb, adopted as its motto by the Italian Renaissance, claims that "Vouloir, c'est pouvoir." This is the beautiful bragging of youth with everything still to do.

'Somebody once asked him what difference there was between the Brahmos and the other Hindus. "No very great one," he replied. "In a concert of haribboys one holds on the same note while the others weave variations beneath it. The Brahmos always come back to the same note, the forlornest aspect of God. But the Hindus play His different aspects."

"Vouloir, c'est pouvoir," literally translated means: "To wish is to be able."

A more mature man, who is not so easily satisfied with words, but who lays emphasis on deeds, reverses the motto so that it reads: "*Pouvoir, c'est vouloir.*"

Ramakrishna suddenly perceived the power within him and the call of the world for its use. The ascendancy he exercised over some of the best minds in India revealed the weaknesses and needs of these intellectuals, their unsatisfied aspirations, the inadequacy of the answers they gained from science, and the necessity for his intervention. The Brahmo Samaj showed him what strength of organisation, what beauty existed in a spiritual group uniting young souls round an elder brother, so that they tendered a basket of love as a joint offering to their Beloved, the Mother.

The immediate result was that his mission, hitherto undefined, became crystallised; it concentrated first in a glowing nucleus of conscious thought wherein decision was centred, and then passed into action.

First of all he saw in their entirety his own relations with God. He saw that this God within him<sup>1</sup> could not be satisfied with personal salvation, as was the case with other Sâdhakas, but

<sup>1</sup> ".... *avoir c'est vouloir*" - "To be able is to wish."

Ramakrishna admitted at this point what the Bhauravi had been the first to proclaim, that he was a neurotic. But he disliked to talk about it, not bear it to be mentioned in front of him. Praise was disagreeable to him. He was much to refuse in public all spiritual privileges, to satisfaction of some of his followers, who would share in them. His conviction lay in an art, a secret light, which he never paraded. I

'required of him the love and service of mankind.' His spiritual struggles, his ecstasies, his realisations were not to be only for his own profit.

"Sic vos non vobis . . ."

They were meant rather to prepare the way for human development, for a new era of spiritual realisation. Other men had the right to aspire to and hope for liberation, but not he. He could not count on that. From century to century he was obliged to go to the help of mankind whenever they were in danger.

And here is the rallying cry, the word of salvation that he was to carry to the men of his day.

1. All religions are true in their essence and in the sincere faith of their believers. The revelation of this universal truth, whatear Rama-

krishna had arrived by common sense as much

to the limits of personal service is in essence the doctrine of service, service, as Swami Ashokananda has well shown, is its motive force (*C/ Prabuddha Bharata*, Almore, February 1928. "The Origin of Swami Vivekananda's Doctrine of Service"). We shall return to this question in the next volume.

"A frequently quoted verse of Virgil, meaning, "You work, but not for yourself."

As a curious fact I note here that Ramakrishna said, pointing to the north-west, that after two hundred years

be would be reincarnated there. (Husar?)

"*Life of Sri Ramakrishna*, pp. 242-247.

as by intuition, was the special object of his coming upon the earth.

2. The three great orders of metaphysical thought. Dualism, "qualified" Monism and absolute Monism, are the stages on the way to supreme truth. They are not contradictory, but rather are complementary the one to the other. Each is the perspective offered to the mental standpoint of one order of individuals. For the masses, who are attracted through the senses, a dualistic form of religion with ceremonies, music, images and symbols is useful. The pure intellect can arrive at qualified Monism; it knows that there is a beyond; but it cannot realise it. Realisation belongs to another order, the Advaita, the inexplicable, the formless Absolute, of which the discipline of Yoga gives a foretaste. It surpasses the logical means of word and spirit. It is the last word of "Realisation." It is Identity with the One Reality.

3. To this scale of thought there is naturally a corresponding scale of duties. The ordinary man lives in the world and can and does fulfil his duties there, striving with affectionate zeal but without attachment to self, just as a good servant takes care of a house, although he is quite aware that the house is not his. By purity and love he is to achieve liberation from his desires. But only step by step with patience and modesty.

"Only undertake those actions that fall within the limits of your purified thoughts and dreams. Seek not to flatter yourself with gigantic deeds. Undertake duties as small in size as your self-surrender to God. Then as your selflessness







7. Narendranath Dutt, a young intellectual, belonging to a Kshatriya family, (later Vivekananda).

8 Mahendra Nath Gupta, the principal of the Vidyadagar High School at Sharnbazar, Calcutta, who has since written *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* under the pseudonym M., and who, unless I am mistaken, directs the school he founded, the Morton Institution; Tarak Nath Goyal, the son of a lawyer, a member of the Brahmo Samaj, the present abbot of the Order under the name of Shivananda.

9. Jogendra Nath Chaudhury, a Brahmin of Dakshinewar belonging to an aristocratic family, (later Yogananda).

11. Sasibhusan (later Ramakrishnananda);

12 Saratchandra Chakravarti (later Saradananda), the Secretary of the Ramakrishna Mission for more than a quarter of a century and the great biographer of Ramakrishna, both Brahmins of Calcutta and members of the Brahmo Samaj;

13. Kātiprasād Chandra, the son of a professor of English (later Abhe-  
dhananda);

14. Harināth Chattopādhyāya, a Brahmin, (later Turjānanda);
15. Hariprasanna Chatterjee, a student (Vijānānanda),
1884. 16. Gangādhara Ghatak, a young student of fourteen, (later Akhānānanda);
17. Gurū Chandra Ghosh, a great actor and dramatist, the founder of the modern Bengali theatre, director of the Star Theatre at Calcutta;
1885. 18. Subodh Ghosh, a student of seventeen, the son of a founder of a temple of Kālī at Calcutta, (later Subodhānanda).
19. Purnachandra Ghosh, who was one of the six chief disciples, and who came to Ramakrishna when he was only thirteen years of age.

I have not been able to find the exact dates for the entry of the following:

20. The rich proprietor, Balarām Bose, a mature and exceedingly pious man, whose gifts helped in the foundation of the Order;
21. The young spiritualistic medium, Nitya Nirānjan Ghosh, whom Ramakrishna rescued by main force from occult beliefs,<sup>1</sup> and who was later Nirānjanānanda;
22. Devendra Mazumdar, a mature married man, an employé of a

<sup>1</sup> "If you always think of ghosts, you will become a ghost. If you think of God, you will be God. Choose!"

Zemindar and brother of the Bengali poet, Surendranath;

23 Baburam Ghosh, a student about twenty years of age (later Prem-abanda);

24. Tulasi Charan Dutt, a student of eighteen (later Nirmalananda)

25 Durgā Charan Nāg, who was the chief disciple living in the world, a real saint of the Golden Legend.

. . . etc.

It can be seen that with the exception of the poor servant, Lata, the majority belonged to the liberal professions, to the Brahmin aristocracy or to the rich middle class of Bengal. They were either young men or in the prime of life, and several had been fashioned by the Brahmo Samaj. But I have only mentioned those who joined Ramakrishna strictly and who were the exponents of his thought.

An ever shifting crowd of all classes and all castes inundated him with its restless movement. They came jumbled together, Maharajahs and beggars, journalists and pandits, artists and devotees, Brahmos, Christians and Mohammedans, men of faith, men of action and business, old men, women and children. Often they journeyed from afar to question him, and there was no rest for him day or night. For twenty hours out of the twenty-four he replied to all comers. Although his weakened health failed under the strain, he

<sup>1</sup> The name of Saradāprasanā Mitrā (Sarama Triguṇatīta) who was one of the monastic disciples of the Master, has been omitted from the list—Publisher

refused nobody, but gave out to all alike his sympathy, his enlightenment, and that strange power of soul, which, even if he did not speak a word, gripped the hearts of his visitors and led them transfused.

of all sincere,

of different

diversities before him and he might reconcile them.

But this to him was only one of the factors making for harmony. He desired something infinitely greater than the reconciliation of warring creeds—that man as a whole should understand, sympathise with and love the rest of mankind—that he should identify himself with the life of humanity. For, since Divinity is inherent in every man, every life for him was a religion, and should so become for all. And the more we love mankind, however diverse, the nearer we are to God.<sup>1</sup> It was unnecessary to seek Him in temples, or to call upon Him for miracles and revelations. He was here, everywhere, every second. We could see Him, we could touch Him, for He was our brother, our friend, our enemy, our very self. And it was because this omnipresent God flowed from the soul of Ramakrishna, because his light illumined, quietly and unperceptibly, the crowd surrounding him, that men left themselves, without understanding why, uplifted and strengthened.

He said to his disciples:

"Are you seeking God? Then seek Him in man! The divinity is manifest in man more than in any other object."  
*(The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna).*



tion, were called into the Divine community, he showed himself very strict in the choice of his disciples; for they were the way, whereon the feet of humanity was to march. He claimed that it was not he, but the Mother, who chose them.<sup>1</sup> But was the Mother any different from the entity we carry in the depths of ourselves? This entity in the case of those, who, like Ramakrishna, have acquired the exceptional power of keeping intact an intense solitary concentration in the midst of a life passed in the midst of an innumerable throng, possesses antennae, which infallibly seek out the inner man. At the most furtive contact they sound the depths, the capacities and the weaknesses, the virtues and the vices, things obscure even to the person under observation, that which is and that which will be. Ordinary men are apt to call in question the reality of this gift of intuitive vision, which reaches from the present into the future. But it is neither more nor less outside the limits of nature than the vibrations of the rod of the "Diviner" on the surface of the earth revealing the water beneath.

Ramakrishna was a wonderful wand in the hand

<sup>1</sup> "I did not choose them. The Divine Mother led them to me. She made me examine them. At night I meditate, the veil falls and reveals them to me. You can then see the ego of a man or a woman as through a glass case. I satisfy myself concerning the character of my disciples before I initiate them."

What man of intuition can fail to recognise this method of thought, the use of this inward eye opening under lowered lids, in the lonely centre of the spirit, on the still warm spoils of the world, captured by the lure of the senses? Only the mode of expression varies and the intensity of the eye



is possible to divide the train of great souls, with which he surrounded himself, into two classes: a third order, as it were, of men and women, who remained serving God in the world, and the chosen band of apostles.

Let us first consider the former: for these disciples or listeners belonging to the second (third order) illustrate the spirit of broad catholicity, animating Ramanakrishna, and to that an extent his religion took into account, not only others as well as for himself, the common duties of humanity.

He did not ask men of goodwill to leave all and follow him. On the contrary he was careful to refrain from saying, "Forsake all to seek salvation," to those already caught by worldly ties, such as married people and fathers of families.

He forbade his disciples to sacrifice the legitimate rights of others "just because you, my son, wish to become a holy man." Personal salvation was mere selfishness in too many cases, and therefore resulted in a worse death of the soul.

"... We owe a debt to the gods. We owe

Third order. It was the name given by St Francis of Assisi to a half lay, half religious order, to which pious people living in the world could (and can still) belong.

## THE MASTER AND HIS CHILDREN



said. "O God, grant that we may be plunged in the river of Devotion and attain the Ocean of Satchidānanda (Being, Knowledge, Eternal Fellowship)." The women were present sitting behind a screen. I showed them to Keshab and said: "If you are all plunged in at once, what will be their fate? . . . So you must come out of the water from time to time, immerse yourselves and come out alternately." Keshab and the others began to laugh.

"Your duty as a married man is to live with your wife as brother and sister as soon as one or two children have been born, and to pray to God that you may be granted the power to live a perfect spiritual life exercising self-control." "Undoubtedly a man, who has once tasted the bliss of God, finds the world insipid. To lead a religious life in the world is to stay in a room

*The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna, II, p. 266*  
 The peasant's son knew much more about the necessities of existence than the rich Keshab and that there is more merit if a poor workman finds a place for one single thought of God during the day, than if he consecrated hours to religious offices like an idle devotee.

*Krishna's teachings, I 43*  
*The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna, I, p. 403*

a debt to parents. We owe a debt to our wives.

No work can be satisfactorily concluded until the debt to parents at least has been paid.

Harish gave up his wife and lives here. But if his wife had not been provided for, I should have called him a wicked fellow. . . .

There are those who are constantly quoting Scriptures, but their deeds and their words do not tally. Ramā Prasanna says that Manu ordered that Sādhus should be served. And his old mother was dying of hunger and was obliged to beg for what she needed! . . . That enrages me! Not even a depraved mother ought to be deserted. . . . So long as parents remain in want, the practice of devotion avails nothing."

"The brother of S. came here for several days. He had left his wife and his children in the care of his brother-in-law. I rebuked him severely. . . . Was it not criminal to leave his home, when he had so many children to bring up? Was it for strangers to feed them and be troubled with them? It was a scandal! . . . I told him to go and look for work."

Talk) was troubled. She told him sorrowfully that when she prayed she could not concentrate.

Ramakrishna asked her,

"What do you love best in the world?"

She replied that it was her brother's little child.

"Very well," answered the affectionate Master,

"fix your thoughts upon him."

She did so and through the little boy she grew

in devotion to the child Krishna.

How I love this flower of tenderness in him!

What deep significance it has! Each one of us,

be his heart as dark as night, has the divine

spark in the most humble impulse of true love.

There is nobody quite destitute of a tiny lamp,

just enough to light up his path. And all ways

are good ways—even the bad ones; and each

and that her meditations would be troubled by thoughts of her. He added

as you are wont, feed and dress her to your heart's content. . . .

Brinda-

a motto-  
I under

ever be the path you follow. God knows the secrets of your heart, and it matters little if you take the wrong path, so long as you are sincere. He Himself will lead you back to the right path. It is well known that no road is perfect. Each person believes that his watch goes well, but in truth none shows the correct time. But that does not hinder people's work. " (Life of Sri Ramakrishna, p. 617)

with only a feeble ray of light. Those who are used to the open air cannot live in prison.<sup>1</sup> But, if you live in a house you have duties to perform. Learn in accomplishing them always to enjoy the ray of light. Do not lose a particle of it, and never lose touch with it; when you are at work, use only one of your hands, and let the other touch the feet of the Lord. When your work is suspended, take His feet in both your hands and put them over your heart! . . .<sup>2</sup> What will you gain, if you renounce the world? Family life is a fortress for you. Moreover, he who has attained knowledge, is always free. It is only the lunatic, who says 'I am enchained,' that ends by being so . . . The mind is all in all. If it is free, you are free. Whether in the forest or in the world I am not enchained. I am the son of God, the King of Kings. Who then dare put me in chains? . . .

So he offered each one the means of freedom—to drink from an inner spring, to share the joy of universal Existence, which is God, contained within a

against

“forcing

hair of the head of anyone dependent upon him. Far from forbidding a man to feel legitimate affection, he showed it to be a means of enlightenment, a peaceful canal with beautiful reflections, leading the pure and the simple to God. Here is a charming example.

The daughter of one of his disciples (Mandāl

<sup>1</sup> Interview with Trailokya Nath Sanjal

<sup>2</sup> Interview with Keshab and his disciples, 1882

Gurish remained in stupefied silence. When he had gone, Ramakrishna said quietly to his attendant disciples :

"That man is a great devotee' of God."

At his own invitation he went to see Gurish act in his Calcutta theatre." Gurish was vain and looked for compliments. But Ramakrishna said to him .

"My son, you suffer from a crooked soul."

Gurish was furious and loaded him with insults. Ramakrishna blessed him and went away. The next day Gurish came to beg his pardon, and became a disciple of Ramakrishna. But he could not give up drinking. Ramakrishna never asked him to do so, with the result that eventually Gurish broke the habit; for Ramakrishna had strengthened his resolution by allowing him to feel that he was absolutely free.

But this was not enough. Ramakrishna told him that to refrain from doing evil was too negative a virtue; he must draw near to God. Gurish found this impossible, for he had never been able to submit to discipline. In despair he said that he would prefer suicide to meditation and prayer. "I am not asking you for much," Ramakrishna replied. "Just one prayer before you eat, and one prayer before you go to bed. Can you not do it?"

"No! I hate routine. I cannot pray or meditate. I cannot even think of God for a second."

"Devotee" is used here, as elsewhere in this book, as meaning, devoted to God, one who has given himself wholly to God.  
Towards the end of 1884. He was present at one of the first performances of Chaitanyahid.

individual destiny, provided that every  
follows his own with loyal sincerity. The  
God's business. Have confidence then and  
forward!

And how deeply and indulgently Ramakrishna  
"Maternal" eye penetrated and understood  
that he knew how to guide the troubled souls  
the most lost of his children, is shown in  
story, worthy of the Franciscan legends, of  
relations with the comedian, Gurb Chandra  
Ghosh.

This great actor and dramatist was a Bohemian  
and a debauchee, a rebel against God, although  
his genius enabled him on occasions to write  
beautiful religious works.<sup>1</sup> But he regarded writing  
as a game. He did not realise a fact  
that struck Ramakrishna at the first glance, that  
he himself was the plaything of God.

He heard people talk of the Paramahansa, and  
was curious to see him, as he might have been  
curious to see a freak in a circus. At their first  
meeting he was drunk and he insulted him.  
Ramakrishna in a calm and bantering tone said to  
him:

"At least you might drink to God! Perhaps He  
drinks as well. . . ."

The drunkard, his mouth agape, exclaimed:

"How do you know?"

"If He did not drink, how could He have  
created this topsyturvy world?"

<sup>1</sup> Maternal, of the Divine Mother.

<sup>2</sup> Some of them have been translated from Bengali into  
English. He is regarded as one of the greatest Bengali  
dramatists.



dramatist and actor, and Ramakrishna never desired it. Instead he purged it. He had been the first to introduce women onto the Bengal stage, and now he rescued many unfortunate girls from misery and uplifted them. Afterwards he took them to Ramakrishna's monastery. He became one of the most religious followers of the Master, one of the greatest of his household disciples. Notwithstanding his freedom of speech and caustic humour, he was respected and venerated after the Master's death by the monastic disciples.

As he was dying, he said.

"The folly of matter is a terrible veil. Take it away from my eyes, Ramakrishna!"

And so, his religious sense, a sixth sense more highly developed in him than any of the others, revealed to Ramakrishna those among the passers-by, who were predestined for a divine sowing, those in whom God was sleeping. One glance, one gesture, was enough to awaken it. Nearly all the disciples yielded to him at the first meeting the vibrations of their inner being, whether they wished to do so or not. He scrutinised them through and through. Other men had only their own salvation to find, but the true disciples were to be leaders and have the charge of other souls. That was why, when they were recruited, they were, as I have said, subjected to physical<sup>1</sup> and

<sup>1</sup> I have followed the narrative of D. G. Mukherji in this account. (But Mukherji's narrative is unfortunately misleading, his book being full of distorted facts and fancies.—*Publisher*) He was very particular about perfect health. The chief disciples, Vivekananda, Brahmamada, Saradananda, Turya-

"Good," replied Ramakrishna. "Well, if you really desire to see the Lord, but if at the same time you will not take a single step towards Him, will you make me your proxy? I will do your praying for you, while you will lead your own life. But take care, you must promise me to live from henceforth absolutely at the Lord's mercy."

Girish accepted his suggestion without fully realising the consequences. His life was no longer under the control of his own will, but at the mercy of inner forces, like a leaf in the wind, or like a kitten whose mother can carry it equally well onto a king's bed as a dust-heap. He had to accept this condition without demur, and it was not easy. Girish struggled loyally, but once he was driven to say:

"Yes, I will do it."

"What did you say?" Ramakrishna cried sternly. "You have no longer the will to do or not to do. Remember! . . . I am your proxy. Your behaviour is according to the will of the Lord within you. I pray for you; but my prayers will avail nothing unless you abandon all initiative."

Girish submitted, and the result of this discipline was that after a time he attained self-surrender to the impersonal Self; he was conquered by God.

But he did not renounce his profession as

of Europe. Up to that time in India the word of the master was law. A Guru exacted from his Chelas (pupils) a deeper respect than that paid to parents. Ramakrishna would have none of it. He put himself on a level with his young disciples. He was their companion, their brother; he talked familiarly with them and without any trace of superiority. The advice he gave them was not his own. It came from the Mother through his lips. "What has it to do with me?" Moreover, words are mere accessories, they are not instruction. True instruction does not consist in inculcating doctrine but in "communicating." But what is to be communicated? A man's self? Not even that, or rather something more than that—the One Self. Or we may describe it as the condition of inward abundance, of vital and digested riches, called "spirituality." And this is to be communicated "as a flower might be given," in the same way that a good gardener

is all. The rest comes from within them. "When the lotus is full blown, the bees come and collect the honey. Let the lotus of character expand naturally."

It followed, therefore, that the Master was very careful not to hinder their development by

" . . . results will come of themselves " (My Master)

moral examination, followed after their admission by a paternal and ever watchful discipline.

He preferred them young, sometimes very young, hardly adolescent,<sup>1</sup> and unmarried, "not yet caught in the net of desire, nor entrapped by riches, free from ties . . ." If, like Brahmas

In general the disciples of this unlettered man were well-educated and knew at least one foreign language in addition to Sanskrit. But this was not an essential; the example of Latu is significant, although it may be said that he was the exception to prove the rule. A humble and ignorant servant, a peasant of Behar and a stranger to Bengal, he was awakened to eternal life by one glance from Ramakrishna, for he possessed unwittingly the same genius of heart as the Master.

"Many of us," said Swami Turiyananda, "had to go through the muddy waters of knowledge before we attained God, but Latu jumped over them, like Hanuman."

What did Ramakrishna teach his disciples? Vivekananda has emphasised the originality of his methods, especially in the India of his day; since then some of his educational principles have been adopted and systematised by the new schools

nanda, etc. seem to have been of athletic build, tall and broad, and possessing rare physical strength. I repeat that he was always careful to examine the tongue, the chest, the working of the organs, before sanctioning the exercises of intensive meditation.

<sup>1</sup> Turiyananda was fourteen years old, Subodhananda

belief that God is in everything, that He is everything, and that it therefore follows that whoever opens his eyes and looks around him will of necessity end by meeting Him! This union with God was such a deep and constant reality in his case that he did not feel any need to prove it, and he would never have dreamt of imposing it upon others. He was too certain that every sane and sincere seeker would arrive at it by himself, and through himself alone. His sole care was to make his disciples sane and sincere.

But who can gauge the moral influence of such a being wholly impregnated with God? It is obvious that his tranquil and constant vision was intermingled with his flesh, like the scent of pines in autumn honey, and hence it would percolate over the tongues of his young and starving disciples, who drank in eagerly his gestures and his movements. But he himself had no suspicion of it. He left them free, so he believed. He believed that God was simply spreading His perfume through his substance, like thyme when the wind blows over it. The thyme makes no effort

It even reached the pitch of hallucination

"Do you know what I see? I see Him in all things. Men and the other creatures seem to me like miniature figures clothed in flesh, and it is the Lord within them that moves head and feet and hands. Once I had this vision. One Substance alone had taken all the forms of the Cosmos and all living creatures—a wax house, with garden, men, cows, all of wax—nothing but wax. . . ."

(*The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, I, p. 437)

"One day it was revealed to me that everything is pure Spirit. The temple vessels, the altar, men, beasts—all pure Spirit! And like a madman I began to rain flowers over everything. Everything that I saw, I worshipped. . . ."

putting himself between the sun and these human plants. His respect for and love of the personality of others, his dread of enslaving it went so far that he was afraid of being loved too dearly. He did not wish the tenderness of his disciples for him to bind them.

"Let the bees suck your heart, but be careful that the beauty of your heart does not keep one of them captive!"

Still less was there any question of imposing his own ideas upon them. There was to be no established Credo! I have already quoted his words

"Mother, do not expound beliefs through my voice!"

And ritual even less!

"God cannot be won by a system of ritual," but only by love and sincerity.

There were no fruitless discussions on metaphysics and theology!

"I do not like argument. God is above the powers of reason. I see that all which exists is God. Then of what avail to reason? . . . Go into the garden, eat the sacred mangoes and go out again! You do not go in to count the leaves on the mango tree. So why waste time in disputes about reincarnation or idolatry?"

What then did matter? Personal experience. Experiment first and then believe in God. Belief ought not to precede but to follow religious experience. If it comes first, it is inconsistent.

Nevertheless Ramakrishna presupposed his own

<sup>1</sup> Cf. *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, *passim*.

belief that God is in everything, that He is everything, and that it therefore follows that whoever opens his eyes and looks around him will of necessity end by meeting Him. This union with God was such a deep and constant reality in his case that he did not feel any need to prove it, and he would never have dreamt of imposing it upon others. He was too certain that every same and sincere seeker would arrive at it by himself, and through himself alone. His sole care was to make his disciples same and sincere.

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to convince you. All you have to do is to smell its fresh scent!

Thus then was the essential part of Ramakrishna's discipline. A man must have and keep his body, senses and spirit honest and pure, unspotted, unworn, as young as Adam.

To achieve this the first rule was continence.

This rule, which our anti-clerics of the West claim with ingenuous ignorance to be a monopoly of the Church of Rome, and against which they are never tired of launching their old and blunted arrows, is as old as the world—(though if the whole world had applied it rigorously it would obviously never have lived to grow old). All great mystics and the majority of great idealists, the giants among the creators of the spirit have clearly and instinctively realised what formidable power of concentrated soul, of accumulated creative energy, is generated by a renunciation of the organic and psychic expenditure of sexuality. Even such free thinkers in matters of faith, and such sensualists as Beethoven, Balzac and Flaubert, have felt this.

"Let me keep it for a higher purpose!" (for

cannot bear any division of themselves; for they know that their God will refuse to visit them in a house cumbered and soiled with desire. (Not only is the act called in question but the thought even more so. It is not enough to practise sexual nence if concupiscence is hidden in the secrets of the heart; for this would be impotence—





activity, however noble, to which they may be devoted."

"You cannot escape work, because *nas* (Prakriti) drives you to it. That being so, let work be done as it should be done." Then if it is done without attachment it leads to God, and is a means to attain the end—and the end is God."

"Without attachment" does not imply without conscience, or zeal or love of good work, but only with disinterestedness.

"To work without attachment is to work without the hope of reward or the fear of punishment, either in this world or in any other. . . ."

But Ramakrishna was too human not to know that such an ideal is very rarely attained by real humanity:

"To work without attachment is extremely difficult, especially in our days, and can only be

hence nobody can help him unless he loves the God in him. And the corollary also holds good: nobody can really know God unless he has seen Him in every man.

This is what the Abbot of the Order, Shivananda, the man whose task it is to represent the true spirit of Ramakrishna in these days, wrote to me:—lines, whose spiritual sense will be familiar to the readers of *Parvati* :

"You appear to conceive some distinction between the realisation of the Divinity in man and the consciousness of universal suffering with regard to motives for service. It seems to me that these are merely two aspects of the same state of mind and not two different ones. It is only by realising the Divinity inherent in man that we can truly grasp the depths of his misery; for not till then will his condition of spiritual servitude, and his lack of perfection and divine happiness appeal to our conscience as almost tangible evidence. It is the sad feeling of contrast between the Divinity in man and his present ignorant state with all the suffering it entails, that pricks the heart to serve mankind. Without the realisation of this Divine Spirit in himself and in others true sympathy, true love, true service are impossible. That is why Sri Ramakrishna wished his disciples to attain Self-realisation. Otherwise

naive in man is the most manifest power of God in the flesh. Man is the greatest manifestation of God." (*The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, I, p. 350)

"The attainment of perfect knowledge is to see God in every man" (*Ibid.*, Vol. II).

December 7, 1927

the most authoritative of his still living disciples, Swami Shivananda, and of one of those who represent his doctrine, Swami Ashokananda, and they have been at great pains to answer me. But in spite of some isolated instances, quoted above, attesting to the active philanthropy of Ramakrishna, they have not been able to prove that well-doing by works occupied any essential place in his teaching. This would be a grave charge (I say it in all loyalty), from the Western point of view, which puts deeds before intentions, and the good of others before individual salvation, if we did not remember, first, that Ramakrishna repudiated the egoism of individual salvation just as much as philanthropy without disinterested love, and, next, that his object was to light the lamp of charity in every heart.

What then is the difference between charity and self-love? Charity is the love emanating from us, not limited in its application to self, family, sect, and country. Self-love is attachment to self, family, sect, and country. Therefore a charity, which raises and leads men to God,<sup>1</sup> is to be cultivated.

For Ramakrishna charity meant nothing less than the love of God in all men; for God is incarnate in man.<sup>2</sup> Nobody can truly love man, and

<sup>1</sup> "Self-love," it goes without saying, is used in its classical meaning of 'love of self.'

<sup>2</sup> *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, I, p. 261.

<sup>3</sup> "You are seeking God? Very well, look for Him in man! The Divinity manifests Itself in man more than in any other object. In truth God is in everything; but He is more or less manifest in other objects. God must

from him cries of despair. He did not possess the strange serenity, wherein, during his last years, the spirit of Ramakrishna floated—that disembodied spirit that had penetrated into the redoubtable sphere of a Beyond, where good and evil were not

“The Absolute is without attachment to the good as well as to the evil. It is like the light of a lamp. You can with its help read the Holy Scriptures, but you can equally well commit forgeries by the same light . . . Whatever the sun, the evil or the misery we find in the world, they are only misery, evil or sin in relation to us. The Absolute is above and beyond. Its sun lights the evil as well as the good.” I am afraid that you must accept the facts of the universe as they are. It is not given to man to penetrate clearly the ways of the Lord. I see and I realise that all three are of the same substance—the victim of the sacrifice, the block and the executioner. . . . Ah, what a vision!”

Yes, the vision has a tragic grandeur akin to the Ocean. And it is good that all vile souls should plunge into it and renew their strength from time to time. It was well that at the bottom of his tender heart Ramakrishna kept its sovereign roaring and salt tang. But it is not for ordinary mortals. They run the risk of being maddened or petrified by terror. Their weakness is not fitted to achieve the synthesis of the Absolute and the ego. In order that their vital spark may not be

‘The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna, I, pp. 61 and 67  
 ‘Ibid., I, p. 101  
 ‘Ibid., I, p. 437

extinguished, "the wand of the ego imposed upon the Ocean of Satchidānanda (Being, Knowledge, Happiness) must be preserved." It may be no more than "a line traced upon the water," but "if you take it away, nothing remains but the one undivided Ocean."<sup>1</sup> So keep it as a protection against vertigo. God Himself has allowed this semblance to support the stumbling steps of his children. They are none the less His. To those who asked Ramakrishna anxiously: "Lord, you speak to us of those who realise the Unity: 'I am He' . . . . But what of those who cannot do so, those who say, 'Thou art not me, yet I seek thee'? What becomes of them?", he replied with a reassuring smile: "There is no difference whether you call Him 'Thou' or call Him 'I am He.' Men that realise Him through 'Thou' have a very lovely relation with Him. It is very much like that of an old trusted servant with his master. As they both grow old, the Master leans and depends on his friend the servant, more and more . . . The Master consults his servant regarding every serious matter that he wishes to undertake. One day, . . . the Master takes him by the hand, then seats him on his own august throne. The servant is embarrassed and says, 'What are you doing, my Lord?' But the Master holds

range of vision of each individual disciple; and from destroying the fragile equilibrium of the

<sup>1</sup> J. II  
 Mukerj, *op. cit.*, p. 161.

human spirit, he was careful to establish it by delicately graduating the proportion of the elements constituting it. He could be seen changing his method according to each temperament to hold such an extent that he sometimes seemed to hold contradictory views. He counselled energy to the angelic Yoganda, whose excessive good nature led him into error :

"A devotee ought not to be a fool."

He scolded him severely for not knowing how to defend himself. But he vehemently enjoined the violent Niranjanaanda, ever ready to march against an enemy or to attack anyone who had insulted him, to cultivate a mild and forgiving spirit in face of injury. In the disciples "of the heroic type," he tolerated certain weaknesses, which he denied to the weaker ones, because the former could not be permanently affected by them. With unerring tact he knew how to calculate the force of reaction in each being.

It might have been expected that a man, who lived in constant contact with the Absolute, beyond the norms controlling the course of ordinary life, would have been incapable of understanding and guiding the thousand nuances of daily action. But the contrary was true in the case of Ramakrishna. His freedom from the chains of illusion removed in the first instance the blinders of all his prejudices, fanaticism and narrowness of heart and mind. And as there was no longer any impediment to his free and frank regard, he judged all things and all men with laughing good sense. One of his Socratic discussions would have surprised a hearer of to-day.

They are often nearer to Montaigne and Erasmus than to the Galilean. Their ironic turn, their gay humour have a refreshing effect. The ardent atmosphere of Bengal must have doubled their appeal to young brains, always ready to be carried away. I will here give two piquant examples of them: the parables of the Elephant and the Serpent. In the former Ramakrishna with diverting irony warned his disciples against the two opposite extremes of violence and absolute non-resistance. In the latter he seems to be treating himself ironically, he had perceived the dangers of amoralism and of indifference to action, which tend to give young heads the sunstroke of the omnipresent God, and he banteringly gauged the degree of His presence in us and our surroundings, and the hierarchy of His forms and laws.





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### THE ELEPHANT

“ONCE upon a time there lived in a certain forest a holy man, who had a great number of disciples. One day he taught them as follows. ‘God’, he said, ‘is in everything. Therefore we ought to bow our heads in adoration before every single object in the world.’ It happened that one of his disciples had gone to collect wood for the sacrificial fire. Suddenly he heard a shout: ‘Scatter! Scatter! A mad elephant is coming!’ Immediately they all fled, except he, who reasoned thus: ‘The elephant is God in one form; why then should I run away?’ So he stayed where he was, he bowed to the elephant as the Lord, and began to sing his praises. The elephant-driver

urred him into the house and cared for his  
 ounds. When he recovered consciousness they  
 icked him. Why did you not save yourself  
 hen you heard the elephant-driver shout? The  
 ough man replied. Our Master had just taught  
 s that God reveals Himself in every living crea-  
 ure. I thought of the elephant as God, and so  
 did not want to leave the place. Then the  
 uru said to him My son, it was true that it  
 as an elephant God, who appeared. But did  
 ot the elephant-driver God tell you to seek  
 helter? It is quite true that God reveals Him-  
 self in all things, but if He is manifest in the  
 elephant, is He not just as much manifest in the  
 elephant-driver—if not more? Tell me then why  
 you paid no attention to his warning. . . .  
 And here is the substance of a mischievous con-  
 version of the Master with the youthful Viveka-  
 nanda :

### THE SERPENT

MASTER (smiling) : "What think you, Naren-  
 dra? People who live in the world often express  
 themselves very bitterly with regard to those who  
 live in God. When an elephant goes his way  
 'The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna, I, p. 56  
 I would remind the reader that Narendra or Naren was  
 the real name of Vivekananda

along the high road, a crowd of rats and other animals always run after him, yapping and snapping at his heels. But he takes no notice and goes on along his own undeviating way. Suppose, my child, people speak evil of you because of your back, what would you do?"

NARENDRA (sternly): "I should regard them as the curs in the street barking at my heels."

MASTER (laughing): "No, my child, you must never go as far as that! Remember that God dwells in all things animate and inanimate. So all things deserve our respect. . . The only thing that we can do in our intercourse with men, is to take care that we consort with the good and avoid the society of the wicked. It is true that God is even in the tiger. But it does not follow that we ought to put our arms round his neck and press him to our heart!" (*The disciples laughed*).

NARENDRA: "Must one then remain quiet, if others insult one?"

MASTER: "Once upon a time there was a field wherein herd boys watched over their cattle. In the same field lived a terrible and poisonous serpent. One day a holy man happened to pass by. The children ran to him and cried: 'Holy man, do not go that way. Beware of the serpent!' 'My children,' said the holy man, 'I am not afraid of your serpent. I know the Mantras which will keep me safe from all harm.' So saying, he continued his way. . . . The serpent saw him and came towards him raising his hood. The holy man murmured a charm, and the serpent fell at his feet as powerless as an earthworm. 'Well,' said the holy man, 'why do you behave

Name,' said the holy man, 'and do no in to any living creature! I shall come again to see how you have been behaving'. And so saying, the holy man departed. . . . Days went by. The little herd boys noticed that the serpent did not bite. They threw stones at it. It remained as quiet and inoffensive as an earthworm. One of the little wretches took it by the tail, waved it round his head and then threw it against the stones several times. The serpent vomited blood and was left for dead. During the night he came to himself; slowly he dragged himself to his hole; his body was broken in pieces. After several days he was nothing but a skeleton; it took him so much time before he could drag himself out to look for food. For fear of the children he only went out at night. From the time of his imitation by the Brahmin he had stopped doing evil to any creature. As well as he could, he tried to live on leaves and other wisps. The holy man returned. He looked every where in order to find the serpent. The children told him that he was dead. The Brahmin was astonished; he knew that the name of the Lord, which the serpent repeated, had the spiritual power to make death impossible before the problem of life had been solved, that is to say, before God had been seen.

He recommenced his search, and called the serpent several times by name. The serpent came out of his hole, and bowed to his teacher. The following dialogue took place:

"HOLY MAN: 'Well, how are you?'"

"SERPENT: 'Thank you, Master. By the grace of God I am very well.'"

"HOLY MAN: 'How is it, then, that you are nothing but skin and bone? What has happened to you?'"

"SERPENT: 'O Master, in obedience to your command I tried not to harm any living creature. I have been living on leaves and other scraps. And so it is possible that I have grown thinner.'"

"HOLY MAN: 'I fear that it is not simply a change of diet that has brought you to this state. There must have been something else. Tell me!'"

"SERPENT: 'Ah! . . . perhaps, . . . yes, . . . I can see what it was without a doubt. One day the little herd boys treated me rather badly. They took me by the tail, and banged me against the stones several times very hard. Poor children! They had no idea of the change that had taken place in me. How were they to know that I would not bite anyone?'"

"HOLY MAN: 'But what madness! What madness! You must be an idiot not to know to stop your enemies from ill-treating you thus! . . . What I forbade you to do was to bite any of God's creatures. But why did you not hiss at those who wanted to kill you, so as to frighten them?' . . ."

And Ramakrishna looked at his disciples with a twinkle in his eye:

"So raise your hood. . . . But do not bite! . . . A man living in society, particularly if he is a citizen and the father of a family, ought to pretend to reveal evil in order to defend himself. But he must at the same time be very careful not to return evil for evil."

I will not vouch for the practical and moral excellence of this last recipe, which savours rather of "*Si vis pacem, para bellum*," a fallacy thus of the same kind as the fallacy of the "law of the jungle." But I will preserve the mocking smile of this spiritual story-teller, so reminiscent of La Fontaine. We must necessarily also consider Ramakrishna's method as at bottom a means to re-establish equilibrium in the ship of action, swinging jerkily and driven by opposing winds from one bank to another, by interposing a common-sense view between the two extremes.

It is obvious that he practised and professed "Ahimsa" (hurt nothing) quite as much as Gandhi. He specifically proclaimed it, not only with regard to man but all living creatures.

The famous French fabulist-writer of the seventeenth

century, opened his eyes and looked around him. One of





mon sense, if the hour had not yet come for them to fly away.

He made them remain in the world so that they might teach it, but first they had to be taught themselves—they had to gain an exact knowledge of their own nature, and the natures of others round them and the Divine Presence permeating them all. Most of them only attained it by labourous, gradual and constant progress, for this knowledge had to be won by their own efforts, although doubtless they could call upon the paternal help of the Gurm; but the will of the Gurm was never substituted for their own, he was only there to help them to find their bearings. With a few exceptions he refused to interfere in

on a weekday he saw a  
uncertain East. This man  
burn one glance without stop-  
it of ex-  
part!  
moment—Tarak  
notionless and  
rare dissolved  
re—At his first  
upon, and  
energy  
to provoke

order to make it their work during the last stage when they were the builders of their own destiny here. He merely encouraged them with his words, and so increased their energy which is

the essence of work here. He would help the disciples when he saw the effort they were making of their own free will. As when he saw Isha Chandra (Chandrananda) engaged in a kind of great devotion, he joined the Master to great him the fruit of his pious desire, and would

discuss with him

the method of

the Master's work

and how best to

have him, the

disciples and

of personal life.

Ramakrishna, a

of his reaction.

led into the temple of Kali by the Master, who said to

him "Behold the living Shiva!" And Gangadhar saw

him.

But the reader must beware lest he labour under a misapprehension. The Master never tried to impose on the disciples visions or thoughts which were not already there; he sought rather to awaken them. To intellectual natures he was the first to advise against research for visual realisations. When Baburam (Premananda), whom he loved, begged him to procure essays for him the Divine Mother warned Ramakrishna that Baburam was destined to have Jñāna (knowledge) and not Jhāna (emotional absorption in God)—he asked the boy, who was to be one of his greatest intellectual disciples, Saratchandra (Saradananda):

"How would you like to realise God? What visions do you have when you meditate?" Saratchandra replied: "I do not care for visions. I do not imagine any particular form of God when I meditate. I imagine Him manifested in all creatures upon earth." Ramakrishna smiled and said: "But that is the last word in spirituality. You cannot attain to it at first." Saratchandra replied: "I cannot be content with less."

Even in the case of the most sensitive visual realisation was only a stage through which to pass. Abhedananda, after having seen gods and goddesses in meditation, one day saw all the forms blending into one luminous image. Ramakrishna told him that for the future he would have no more visions; he had passed that stage. And in fact from that day Abhedananda had nothing but the consciousness of the infinite and of immensity, finally reaching

general it was during the last stage of their upward ascent, when they had manfully attained the bliss of the stage at the top of the slope by their own independent efforts. Then the Master often agreed to bestow the final shock of Illumination. A little thing was sufficient, a word, a look, a touch, like the lightning of Grace, which never fell except into prepared souls on heights already attained. No new knowledge was revealed, but

the impersonal Brahman—When Sri Ramakrishna heard the Master, Ramakrishna called Baburam to his side and said respectfully: "What more can you ask me for? Is not all that I have yours? All that I have won in the way of realization is for you. Here is the key, open and take everything."

But he added to the Vedantist, Harinath (Turiyanda): "If you think you can find God better away from me, then go! My one desire is that you should raise yourself above the misery of the world and enjoy divine beatitude. And so in a thousand ways he used all his influence to direct these young souls in their true religious sense, so that they might develop their own true and highest individuality. He never dreamt of undressing them. He gave himself to them. He never said to them, and never thought, 'You ought to give yourself to me.' Herein lies one of the main differences between his guidance and

materialism or even spiritualism. I hold the same opinion as Barclay (Turiyanda) in this connection. We must have more. We cannot be satisfied with less. That which the eyes could not count for little compared to

the higher vision of their own ideals. The present Abbot of the Order, Swami Chirandra wrote to me

everything that they had known before, all the store of knowledge that they had slowly amassed became in a flash tangible life and living reality. "At that point you realise that all things live like your own self, in God. You become the will-power and the conscience of all that is. You will become that of the whole universe. . ."

This realisation was the last stage, for beyond this temporary revelation lay the supreme realisation, the absolute Identity, obtained in the Nirvikalpa Samâdhi (the Highest Ecstasy). But that was reserved for men, who had achieved their mission in life; it was the ultimate and forbidden joy; for from it there is no return except in a few exceptional cases like that of Ramakrishna himself. In spite of the prayers of his disciples, he

new three times through his touch and by his will. I still live to bear direct witness to his tremendous spiritual power."

Let the learned men of Europe, who are preoccupied by the problems of mystic psycho-analysis put themselves in is yet time. such phenomena doubt, and I am hedged and analytical act of great to be rather such as or as in that

... of the ... we espouse  
impose our will

was loth to let them taste of it, they had not yet won the right. He knew only too well that such "salt dolls" would no sooner touch the first waves of that Ocean than they would be absorbed in it. He who is devout of attaining Identity with Unique Reality only receives a return ticket by a miracle

The disciples therefore had to remain in this world at the stage before the final, where in identification with all reality takes place. Properly speaking it is the stage of Illumination, to which we can all aspire and to which we have the power to attain by ourselves and to guide others to a similar attainment

And what do we, the free spirits of the West, who have realised the unity of living beings through reason or love, do that is different from this? Is it not the constant aim of our own efforts, the passion inspiring us, the profound faith whereby we live and are carried over the bloody waters of hatred between men without soiling so much as the soles of our feet? Is it not the one object of our desire and our profound conviction that sooner or later it will come to pass—the unity of all nations, races and religions? And are we not in this, although ignorant of it, the disciples of Ramakrishna?

"The world is the field of action where man is put to work just as men come from their country houses to busi-  
ness in Calcutta." (*The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* II, p. 147)

(Sri Ram Vivekananda realised Nirvikalpa Samadhi even during the lifetime of the Master. And it cannot be said that some of the other disciples did not.—Publisher)

## NAREN, THE BELOVED DISCIPLE

BUT among the Indian disciples of the Upper Room, all of whom, as I shall show, later distinguished themselves by faith and works, there was one exceptional disciple, whom Ramakrishna treated in an exceptional way. He had chosen him at the very first glance before the young man so much as knew him, on account of what he was and what he might become—a spiritual leader of humanity: Narendranath Dutt, Vivekananda.

The Paramahansa with his intuitive genius for souls, for whom time was not, and who could discern in the twinkling of an eye the whole flood of the future, believed that he had seen the great disciple in the womb of the elect before he met him in the flesh.

I will give here an account of his beautiful vision. Doubtless I could try to explain it by ordinary methods as well as any of our psychologists, but such explanation is immaterial. We know that a mighty vision creates and produces that which it has seen. In a deeper sense the prophets of the hereafter have been the real creators of what was not yet, but which was trembling on the verge of being. The torrent forming the remarkable destiny of Vivekananda would have been lost in the bowels of the earth, if Ramakrishna's glance had not, as with one blow of an axe, split the rock barring its way, so that through

the breach thus made the river of his soul could flow.

"One day I found that my mind was soaring high in Samādhi along a luminous path. It soon transcended the stellar universe and entered the subtler region of ideas. As it ascended higher and higher, I found on both sides of the way ideal forms of Gods and Goddesses. The mind then reached the outer limits of that region, where a luminous barrier separated the sphere of relative existence from that of the Absolute. Crossing that barrier, the mind entered the transcendental realm, where no corporeal being was visible. Even the Gods dared not peep into that sublime realm, and were content to keep their seats far below. But the next moment I saw seven venerable sages seated there in Samādhi. It occurred to me that these sages must have surpassed not only men but even the Gods in knowledge and holiness, in renunciation and love. Lost in adoration, I was reflecting on their greatness, when I saw a portion of that undifferentiated luminous region condense into the form of a divine child. The child came to one of the sages, tenderly clasped his neck with his lovely arms, and addressed him in a sweet voice, tried to drag his mind down from the state of Samādhi. That magic touch roused the sage from the superconscious state, and he fixed his half-open eyes upon the wonderful child. His beaming countenance showed that the child must have been the treasure of his heart. In great joy the strange child poked to him. 'I am going down. You too must go with me. The sage remained mute but his

tender look expressed his awe. As he kept gazing at the child, he was again immersed in Samādhi. I was surprised to find that a fragment of his body and mind was descending to earth in the form of a bright light. No wonder had I seen Narendra than I recognised him to be that sage."<sup>1</sup>

The *veer* does not say who was the child, but we can guess. Indeed he himself avowed to the disciples<sup>2</sup> that it was he. Certainly he remained throughout his life the *Rambino*,<sup>3</sup> whose lips drank the milk of the Mother, and who only left Our Lady's arms for an instant, in order to fulfil his destiny—the destiny, according to his own declaration, of sending into the world a man better fitted than himself to guide mankind and to take over the command of the army.

His judgment was a sound one. He needed a strong body, arms to turn over the earth, legs to journey over it, a bodyguard of workers and the head to command them, in addition to his great heart charged with love for the the whole world. That his burning faith made realisation spring from the soil not only proves his foresight and the strength of his desire, but that the soil of Bengal was prepared and feverishly awaiting his call. Vivekananda was projected into the "century" by the child-birth of Nature herself; for the time of parturition had arrived for that form of spirit.

Ramakrishna is also to be commended for

<sup>1</sup> *Life of Sri Ramakrishna*, p. 438.

<sup>2</sup> Saradananda.

<sup>3</sup> "Rambino" is the name given in the pictures of the Italian Renaissance to the infant Christ in the arms of the Madonna.



seeing at once in this wayward, tormented and storm-loved adolescent, as Narendra then was, the future leader, exactly the Evangelist he was expecting.

The story of their early meetings deserves to be told in its entirety. The reader will then feel the same attraction that Naren in spite of himself experienced, and which, in spite of himself, united him to the Master who had chosen him.

But let us first draw the portrait of this young genius at the moment when his meteor entered and was absorbed in the orbit of Ramakrishna.

He was a member of a great aristocratic Kshatriya family, and his whole life showed the stamp of that warrior caste. He was born on January 12, 1863, at Calcutta. His mother was a highly educated woman of regal majesty, whose heroic spirit had been nurtured on the great Hindu epics.<sup>2</sup> His father, who led an ostentatious and restless life, showed an independence of spirit almost Voltairian in quality, akin to that of a great French Seigneur of the eighteenth century,

<sup>1</sup> "I regard her in America at the  
 of her public homage, in his lectures  
 good he often spoke of her,  
 d. "who has been the constant  
 work."



studied vocal and instrumental music for four or five years under famous Hindu and Mussulman professors. He wrote tunes and published a documented Essay on the science and philosophy of Indian music. Indeed he was everywhere regarded as a musical authority. For him music was always the gate of the temple; the vestibule of the palace of the Most High. At college he was distinguished for his brilliant intellect, embracing with equal zest the sciences, astronomy, mathematics, philosophy, and Indian and Western languages. He read the English and Sanskrit poets. He devoured the historical works of Green and Gibbon. He was fired by the French Revolution and Napoleon. From his childhood up he practised, like so many Indian children, the habit of meditation. At night he used to pore over *The Imitation of Jesus Christ* and the Vedānta. He loved philosophic discussions. It was this mania for argument, criticism, "discrimination," that later won for him the name of Vivekananda. He tried to weld Hellenic beauty and Indo-Germanic thought into one harmonious whole. But to his universalism, which attained the standards of Leonardo and Alberti with its spiritual empire over life in all forms, was added the crown of a religious soul and absolute purity. This beautiful ephebe, to whom all the good things of life and its pleasures were offered, though free and passionate, imposed upon himself a rigorous chastity. Without being tied to any

'The temple of the Goddess Sarasvati, the patron of the arts

sect, before he had adopted any Credo, he had already the feeling, the profound reason for which I shall show later, that purity of body and soul is a spiritual force, whose fire penetrates into every aspect of life, but is extinguished by the slightest defilement. Moreover, he was overshadowed by a great destiny, and though he was as yet unaware of its direction, he wished to be worthy of it and to realise it.

The result of such a multiplicity of gifts and contending passions made him live for many years in great turmoil of soul before his personality became fixed. Between the ages of seventeen and twenty-one (from 1860 to the end of 1884) he went through a series of intellectual crises increasing in intensity until religious certainty finally put an end to them.

He was first moved by reading Stuart Mill's *Essays on Religion*, which caused his optimistic surface theism, gleaned in fashionable Brahmo Samajist circles, to crumble away. The face of Evil in nature appeared to him, and he revolted against it. But he was powerless to prevent the intrusion of bored disillusion and antique melancholy<sup>1</sup> (in the sense of Albrecht Dürer). In vain he tried to adopt the theories of Herbert Spencer, with whom he corresponded.<sup>2</sup> He asked the older

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 . . . . .

<sup>1</sup> Spencer was astonished, so it is said, by his daring criticisms, and admired the precociousness of his philosophic intellect. According to Saradananda study of Western philosophy between

search for the truth. It was to Seal that he owed his reading of Shelley and that he bathed his burning soul in the aerial waves of the poet's pantheism.<sup>7</sup> His young mentor then wished to enroll him in the service of the God of Reason—the Parabrahman—a conception particularly his kind in that it claimed to be an amalgamation of the pure monism of the Vedānta, the Hegelian dialectic of the Absolute Idea, and the gospel of the French Revolution. Liberty, Equality, Fraternity. He believed that the principle of individualism was "the evil" and Universal Reason "the good". It was then essential that pure reason should be manifested; this was the great modern problem, and Brajendra thought to solve it by Revolution. His revolutionary and imperial

<sup>7</sup> The *Sanskrit Vedaśāstra*, Vol I, pp 172-177. Although at college he was in the class above Vivekananda, the latter was a little his senior. He also read Wordsworth, of all English poets the one who seems most akin to the poets of the Far East.

rationalism appealed to some sides of Narendra's domineering nature. But the latter's tumultuous personality was not to be confined within such limits. Although his intellect certainly wished to accept (or impose) the sovereignty of universal reason and to make the foundation of morality an imperious negation of individualism, his life would not agree. He was too intoxicated with the beauty of the world and its passions. An attempt to deprive him of it was like condemning a young beast of prey to vegetarianism. His melancholy and anguish redoubled. It was mockery to offer him a diet of immanent Reason, a bloodless God! Being a real Hindu for whom life is the first attribute, if not the very essence of Truth, he needed the living revelation, the realisation of the Absolute, God made man—some holy Guru, who could say to him: "I have seen

reactions against Ramakrishna.

He was, like all young Bengal intellectuals of his time, drawn by the pure light of Keshab Chunder Sen. It was then at its height and Naren envied it: he could have wished to be Keshab. He was naturally in sympathy with his new order, and joined it. His name was enrolled on the list of members of the new Brahmo Samaj.<sup>1</sup> The Ramakrishna Mission has since maintained that

<sup>1</sup> His name remained on the list a long time after he had become the Swami Vivekananda, and he told his disci-

be could not have been entirely in accord with the spirit of categorical reform held by this Samaj, which ran counter to even the most respectable prejudices of orthodox Hinduism. But I am inclined to disagree with them. The reckless character of young Naren would have delighted in wholesale destruction, and he was not the man to reproach his new companions for iconoclasm. It was only later, and in great part owing to Rama-krishna's influence, that he came to conceive of and profess respect for even antiquated beliefs and customs, provided they were in accordance with long tradition and deeply assimilated into the substance of the nation.<sup>1</sup> But I am convinced that this did not come to pass without a struggle, and it is partly this, which explains his first recoil of intellectual mistrust from Ramakrishna. For the time being, however, he had joined the movement of young Brahmos in Bengal for the education and unity of the Indian masses without distinction of caste, race or religion. Some of them attacked orthodox Hinduism even more bitterly than did the Christian missionaries, but it was fatal that Naren's free and living intelligence should have quickly realised the unintelligent narrowness of such critics, who were not free from cross-grained fanaticism, and that his spirit no

plies that he had never withdrawn it. When he was asked in later years "Do you attack the Brahmo Samaj?" he answered "Not at all." He considered this society to be a high form of Hinduism (C/ The Life of the Swami Vivekananda, Vol. I, Chapter 38, devoted to the Brahmo Samaj).  
<sup>1</sup> In the maturity of his powers he often insisted on this point, that his own message was not a negation but fulfil-

less than his national pride should have been wounded by them. He would not subscribe to the abdication of Indian wisdom before the badly assimilated knowledge of the West.\* Nevertheless he continued to attend the meetings of the Brahmo Samaj, but in his heart he was not at rest.

He next imposed upon himself the life of an ascetic, living in a dark, damp room, lying on the ground upon a quilt with books everywhere, making tea on the floor, reading and meditating day and night. He suffered excruciating and stabbing pains in his head, but he did not achieve the reconciliation of the conflicting passions of his nature, whose struggles lasted even into his troubled sleep.

"From my youth up," he relates, "every night just as I fell asleep two dreams took shape. In one I saw myself among the great ones of the earth, the possessor of riches, honours, power and glory; and I felt that the capacity to attain all these was in me. But the next instant I saw myself renouncing all worldly things, dressed in a simple loin-cloth, living on alms, sleeping at the foot of a tree; and I thought that I was capable also of living thus, like the Rishis of old. Of these two pictures the second took the upper hand and I felt that only thus could a man attain supreme

ment of true Hindu thought. He was a partisan of radical reforms, but he held that they should be carried out by conservative methods. (*Ibid*)

These are practically the very words of Keshab. "To preach Hindu conservatism in a liberal spirit" (*Indian Empire*, 1884).

\* This shows that Naren was not entirely in agreement with the spirit of categorical reform maintained by the Brahmo Samaj.—*Publisher*.



thine . . . And I fell asleep in the forestate of that  
 thine . . . And each night it was renewed . . .  
 Such was he at the moment when he went to  
 meet the Master, who was to govern the rest of  
 his life. In the great city where India and Europe  
 meet, he had made the round of the great religious  
 individuals, but he had returned unsatisfied.  
 He sought in vain, tasted, rejected. He wander-  
 ed . . .

He was eighteen and preparing for his first  
 University Examination. In November 1850 in  
 the house of a friend, Surendranath Mitra, a rich  
 publican converted to the Indian Christ, during a  
 small festivity at which Naren had sung a beauti-  
 ful religious hymn, the "falcon's cry" of Rama-  
 krishna for the first time pierced to the depths of  
 his unsatisfied soul, and fixed his choice upon it.  
 He asked Naren to come to see him at Dakshines-  
 war.  
 The young man arrived with a band of thought-  
 less and frivolous friends. He came in and sat  
 down, heedless of his surroundings, without seem-  
 ing to see or hear anything, wrapt in his own  
 thoughts. Ramakrishna, who was watching him,  
 asked him to sing. Naren obeyed, and his song  
 had such a pathetic tone that the Master, like

possible that such a man can live in Calcutta?"  
 and offered to see him  
 " . . . And each night it was renewed . . ."  
 " . . . And I fell asleep in the forestate of that  
 thine . . ."

much confusion of thought, and if he had been asked at the moment what were to be his relations with Ramakrishna, he would doubtless have

war.

"I found him alone sitting on his small bed. He was glad to see me, and called me affectionately to sit near him on one side of the bed. But a moment later I saw him convulsed with some emotion. His eyes were fixed upon me, he muttered under his breath, and drew slowly nearer. I thought he was going to make some eccentric remark as on the previous occasion. But before I could stop him, he had placed his right foot on my body. The contact was terrible. With my eyes open I saw the walls and everything in the room whirling and vanishing into nothingness. . . . The whole universe and my own individuality were at the same time almost lost in a nameless void, which swallowed up everything that is. I was terrified, and believed I was face to face with death. I could not stop myself from crying out. 'What are you doing? I have parents at home. . . .' Then he began to laugh, and passing his hand over my breast, he said. 'All right. Let us leave it at that for the moment! It will come, all in good time.' He had no sooner said these words than the strange phenomena disappeared. I came to myself again, and everything, both outside and in, was as before."

I have written down this astonishing account

the Western reader may think, he cannot help being struck by the power of hallucination in these Indian souls, recalling that of Shakespeare's passionate visionaries. It may, however, be noted in passing that the visionary in this case was anything but a weak, credulous and uncritical spirit. He revolted against his own vision. His strong

kind of mesmerism. But he had no symptoms of it. Still trembling from the tornado that had swept over him, he remained on his guard. But after this one great shock the rest of the visit was quite normal. Ramakrishna treated his visitor with simple and familiar kindness as if nothing had happened.

At his third visit, probably a week later, Naren was on the defensive with all his critical faculties on the alert. Sri Ramakrishna that day took him to an adjacent garden. After strolling for some time they took their seats in the parlour. Soon the Master fell into a trance and as Narendran watched, he was suddenly touched by him. Narendran immediately lost all outward consciousness. When he came to himself after a while, he saw Ramakrishna looking at him, and stroking his chest.

In after days the Master told his disciples: "I asked him several questions while he was in that state. I asked him about his antecedents and whereabouts, his mission in this world and the duration of his mortal life. He dived deep into himself and gave fitting answers to my ques-

them. They only confirmed what I had seen and inferred about him. These things shall be a secret, but I came to know that he was a sage who had attained perfection, a past master in meditation, and that the day he learned his real nature he would give up the body by an act of will.

But at the time Ramakrishna told him nothing of all this, although he treated him in the light of his special knowledge, and Naren had a privileged place among the disciples.

But Naren had not yet accepted the title of disciple. He did not want to be the disciple of anyone. He was struck by the incomprehensible power of Ramakrishna. It attracted him, as a magnet attracts iron, but he himself was made of stern metal. His reason would not submit to domination. If in his recent relations with the rationalist Brajendra Seal it had been his heart that strove against his intellect, now his intellect mistrusted his heart. He was resolved to maintain his independence, and to accept nothing from the Master except what could be rigorously controlled by his own reason. The uncritical faith of the others roused his contempt.

No stranger relations can be imagined than those now established between the young man and the old Guru.<sup>1</sup> Naren detested all forms of sentimental piety, such as tears or anything that

<sup>1</sup> *Life of Sri Ramakrishna*, p. 410 et seq.

<sup>2</sup> Naren lived for five years with Ramakrishna, at the same time keeping a home of his own at Calcutta. He was at Dakshineswar once or twice a week, and sometimes

savoured of the effeminate Naren questioned everything. He never allowed his reason to abdicate for a single instant. He alone weighed all Ramakrishna's words, he alone doubted him from being shocked, Ramakrishna loved him the better for it. Before meeting Naren he had been heard to pray.

"O Mother, send me someone to doubt my Realisations."

The Mother granted his prayer. Naren denied the Hindu gods, but at the same time he rejected Advaitism, which he termed atheism. He openly mocked the injunctions of the Hindu Scriptures.

He said to Ramakrishna:

"Even if millions of men called you God, if I had not proved it for myself, I would never do so."

Ramakrishna laughingly approved, and said to his disciples

"Do not accept anything because I say so. Test everything for yourselves."

The keen criticism of Naren, and his passionate arguments filled him with joy. He had a profound respect for his brilliant intellectual sincerity with its tireless quest for the truth, he regarded it as manifestation of divine power, which would finally overcome all illusion. He said:

"Look, look, what power of penetration! He is a raging fire consuming all impurities. Mahatma! Himself cannot come nearer to him than ten feet! She is held back by the glory she has imparted to him."

'That was the attitude of the Brahme Samaj



transference of his heart. It was impossible to satisfy his mind with the proof of God. Indian fashion, he maintained

"If God is real, it is possible to reach Him."

But he gradually discovered that the man of reality, whom he had at first believed to be swayed entirely by the promptings of his heart, was infinitely more matter than he was himself in the realm of the intellect. Later he was to say of Hamakrishna:

"Outwardly he was all Bhaktia, but inwardly all Jnana. . . I am the exact opposite."

But before he came to make such a statement, and before he had yielded of his own free will his proud independence into the Master's hands, he both sought him and fled from him, and between the two there was a reciprocal game of passionate attraction and secret struggle. The brutal frankness of Naren, his lack of consideration for all things that he mistrusted, the implacable war he declared against all charlatanism, and his proud indifference to the opinion of others, drew down upon him enmity and slander, which he was too proud to heed.

Sardarsadda, who was later one of his friends and most devoted followers, and who has written the best account of his relations with Hamakrishna, admits that he was himself ill-disposed towards Naren when he met him for the first time at the house of a mutual friend. Naren came in, well dressed and well groomed, with a distinguished air; he sat down humming a Hindu song to himself, and began to smoke without appearing to care for any of the others present. But he took part in the discussion that followed about contemporary literature, and suddenly revealed his predilection for Hamakrishna; the only man, he said, whom he had found reading his inner ideal in this life without any compromise (cf. the Chapter "Vivarta-  
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Ramakrishna never allowed them to be in his presence; for he was sure of Naren. said that the young man was of the purest and that no taint of this world could sully him. His only fear was lest so admirable an intellect might lose its way, and the multiplicity of powers striving within him might be put to a bad use, such as the founding of a new sect or of a new party, instead of being consecrated to the world's union and unity. He had a passionate affection for Naren, but his anxious or tender manifestations of it, if Naren stayed away for any length of time, both embarrassed and irritated the latter. Ramakrishna himself was ashamed of them, but he could not help himself. He infuriated Naren by his excessive praise, as when he publicly placed the recognised fame of Keshab below the prophetic fame of this young man, who had as yet accomplished nothing. He went to look for him in the streets of Calcutta, and even in the temple of the Sadharan Brahmo Samaj,<sup>2</sup> where his unexpected entry during a service provoked scandal and roused much scornful criticism. Naren, mortified and touched at the same time

by Nanda and Ramakrishna," in the last volume of the *Biography of Ramakrishna* by Saradananda: *Devotional Bhakti*.

<sup>1</sup> Far from shaking Naren's faith in himself, he encouraged it. He gave him privileges over the other disciples; for instance, he allowed him to touch all kinds of impure food, saying that for such as he such matters were immaterial.

<sup>2</sup> The branch of the Brahmo Samaj, that had broken away from Keshab. It was the most uncompromising from the nationalistic point of view; and it is noteworthy that there was then a report of it. Ramakrishna had very many enemies among its members, who bore him a grudge for the advice he exercised over them.



spoke harshly to him in order to rid himself of this pursuit. He told him that no man ought to allow himself to be infatuated by another, that if Ramakrishna loved him too much he would forfeit his own spiritual greatness and sink to his level. The simple and pure Ramakrishna listened to him fearfully, and then went to ask the Mother's advice. But he returned comforted.

"Ah, wretch!" he said to Naren, "I will not listen to you. The Mother has told me that I love you because in you I see the Lord. If the day comes when I can no longer see Him, I shall not be able to bear the sight of you."

Soon their parts were reversed. A time came when Naren's presence was received by Ramakrishna with complete indifference. He did not appear to notice him but occupied himself with the others. This went on for several weeks. Nevertheless Naren always came patiently back. Ramakrishna asked him why, since he no longer spoke to him, and Naren replied:

"It is not just your words that attract me. I love you and need to see you."

The Master's spirit gradually took possession of the rebel disciple. In vain the latter ridiculed Ramakrishna's beliefs, especially the two extremes: the cult of images, and faith in an Absolute Unity,—the fascination of God worked slowly.

"Why do you come here, if you do not want to acknowledge my Mother?" Ramakrishna asked him.

"Must I acknowledge Her, if I come?" replied

Naren.

"Well," said the Master, "several days hence

you will not only accept Her, but you will weep at the mention of Her name."

It was the same when Ramakrishna wanted to open the doors of Advantist Vedāntism of identity

curiosity urged him to visit Dakshineswar. He spent an afternoon there and came away in a state of moral and physical astonishment. All his preconceived ideas were wavering. Without understanding it he was subjugated by the atmosphere which seemed to emanate from the person of Ramakrishna. It may be interesting to trace the unpremeditated reaction of a great intellectual and rationalist thinker, a man high in his University, who thus

about preaching and teaching the creed of the Universal Man, and the absolute and inalienable sovereignty of the Self;  
(A. Bhar  
Ivel  
rabuddha  
a Swami

with the Absolute, to Naren. Naren rejected the idea as blasphemy and madness. He did not let any chance go by of ridiculing it; and one day he and one of the other disciples jeered and gave vent to side-splitting laughter at its extravagance. "This jug," they said, "is God! . . . and these flowers are God! . . ." From the adjoining room Narakrishna heard the laughter of the great children. He came in quickly in a semi-conscious state, and touched Naren. Again a spiritual tornado swept him. All at once everything was changed in Naren's eyes. He saw with amazement that nothing existed but God. He went back to his house. All that he saw, touched, ate, was God. . . . He stopped doing anything, intoxicated by Universal Force. His parents became anxious and thought he was ill. He remained in this condition for some days. Then the dream vanished. But its remembrance remained with Naren as a foretaste of the Advaitic state, and he never afterwards allowed himself to deny its existence.

He then passed through a series of mystic storms. He repeated "Shiva! . . . Shiva!" like a madman. Narakrishna looked on with compassionate understanding.

as a forced descent of another into the abyss he had first descended himself

"Yes, I remained for twelve years in that condition."

But his leonine nature, which leaped in great bounds from ironic denial to illumination, would never have undergone a lasting transformation, if the citadel had not been mined from within and not from without. The rough scourge of sorrow came suddenly to whip him out of his comfortable doubt and the luxury of intellectualism on which he prided himself, and brought him face to face with the tragic problem of evil and existence.

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At the beginning of 1881 his careless and prodigal father died, suddenly carried off by a heart attack, and the family found itself faced with ruin. There were six or seven mouths to feed, and a swarm of creditors. From that day onwards Naren tasted misery, knew the vain search for employment and the denial of friends. He has told his distress in pages that are among the most poignant of confessions.\*

"I almost died of hunger. Barefoot I wandered from office to office, repulsed on all sides. I gained experience of human sympathy. This was my first contact with the realities of life. I discovered that it had no room for the weak, the poor, the deserted. Those who several days before would have been proud to help me, turned away their faces, although they possessed the means to do so. The world seemed to me to be

\* This account is taken from the *Life of Sri Ramakrishna* p. 243 et seq.

the creation of a devil. One burning day, when I could hardly stand upon my feet, I sat down in the shade of a monument. Several friends were there, and one began to sing a hymn about the abundant grace of God. It was like a blow aimed deliberately at my head. I thought of the pitiable condition of my mother and brothers, and cried. 'Stop singing that song! Such fantasies may sound pleasantly in the ears of those who are born with a silver spoon in their mouth, and whose parents are not at home dying of hunger. Oh yes, there was a time when I too thought like that! But now that I am faced with all the cruelty of life, it rings in my ears like deadly mockery.' My friend was hurt. He could not make allowance for my terrible distress. More than once, when I saw that there was not enough food to go round at home, I went out, telling my mother that I was invited elsewhere, and I fasted. My rich friends sometimes asked me to go to their houses to sing, but practically not a single one of them showed any curiosity about my misfortunes; and I kept them to myself. . . ."

Throughout this period he continued to pray to God every morning. One day his mother heard him, and, her piety secretly shaken by too great misfortune, said to him

"Fool, be quiet! You have made yourself hoarse with praying to God from your childhood up. And what has He done for you? . . ."

Then he in his turn was filled with anger against God. Why did He not answer his anguished appeals? Why did He allow so much suffering

on the earth? And the bitter words of the Pandit Vidyāsâgar came into his mind:

"If God is good and gracious, why then do millions of people die for want of a few morsels of food?"

A furious revolt arose to heaven. He declared war upon God.

He had never been able to conceal his thoughts and now he spoke openly against God. He proved that He was either non-existent or evil. His reputation as an atheist became established, and as is the practice of devout people, unmentionable motives were adduced for his unbelief, and his habits were maligned. Such dishonesty hardened him, and he took a sombre delight in boasting publicly that in such a depraved world a victim, as he was, of the persecutions of fortune had every right to seek momentary respite in whatever pleasure he might find; and that if he, Narendra, decided that such means were efficacious, he should certainly not shrink from using them for fear of anybody. To some of Ramakrishna's disciples, who offered their pious remonstrances, he replied that only a coward

<sup>1</sup> The Pandit Vidyâsagar (Isvar Chandra, 1820-1891) was a social reformer, the director of the Sanskrit College at Calcutta, and knew Ramakrishna. His memory is held in veneration less for his great learning than for his love of humanity. He was the impotent witness of the famine of 1864 with its more than 100,000 victims, which made him reject God, and devote himself wholly to the service of

believed in God through fear. And he drove them away. At the same time the idea that Rāmakrishna might blame him like the rest troubled him. Then his pride revolted. "What does it matter? If a man's reputation rests on such slender foundations, I do not care. I spurn it under foot!"

All judged him lost except Rāmakrishna in his retreat at Dakshineswar, and he kept his confidence in Naren; but he was waiting for the psychological moment. He knew that Naren's salvation could only come from him.

The summer passed. Naren continued his harassing search for a means of livelihood. One evening when he had eaten nothing, he sank down, exhausted and wet through, by the side of the road in front of a house. The delirium of fever raged in his prostrate body. Suddenly it seemed as if the folds enveloping his soul were rent asunder, and there was light. "All his past doubts were automatically solved. He could say truly "I see, I know, I believe, I am undeceived"

His mind and body were at rest. He went in and spent the night in meditation. In the morning his mind was made up. He had decided to renounce the world as his grandfather had done,

his father, and the last reserves of the will to struggle exhausted.

and he fixed a day when this definite vow was to be accomplished.

Now on that very day Ramakrishna, all knowing, came to Calcutta, and begged Naren to come back with him for the night to Dakshin war. Naren tried in vain to escape; but he was obliged to follow the Master. That night, when up in his room with him, Ramakrishna began to sing, and his beautiful chant brought tears to the eyes of the young disciple; for he realised that the Master had divined his purpose. Ramakrishna said to him :

"I know that you cannot remain in the work. But for my sake, stay in it as long as I live."

Naren went back home. He had found some work in a translation office and in a solicitor's office, but he had no permanent employment, so that the fate of his family was never assured from one day to the next. He asked Ramakrishna to pray for him and his.

"My child," said Ramakrishna, "I cannot offer up those prayers. Why do you not do so yourself?"

Naren went into the temple of the Mother. He was in a state of exalted fervour; a flood of love and faith coursed through him. But when he returned and Ramakrishna asked if he had prayed, Naren realised that he had forgotten to ask for the alleviation of his misery. Ramakrishna told him to go back. He returned a second time and a third time. No matter how often he entered the temple, the purpose of his prayers eluded before his eyes. At the third attempt indeed he remembered what he had come to ask.



but he was overcome with shame "What pitiful interests they were, for which to importune the Mother!" He prayed instead.

"Mother, I need nothing save to know and to believe."

From that day a new life began for him. He knew and believed, and his faith, born, like that of Goethe's old harpist, in misery, never forgot the taste of bread soaked in tears, nor his suffering brethren who had shared the crumbs. One sublime cry proclaimed his faith to the world.

"The only God in whom I believe, is the sum total of all souls, and above all I believe in my God the wicked, my God the miserable, my God the poor of all races. . . ."

The Galilean had conquered. The tender Master of Bengal had broken the resistance of his pride. Ramakrishna in future had no more submissive

born to .

become,

with each other. It was necessary to exercise a moderating influence over this transported soul, that did not know what it meant to give by halves. Ramakrishna knew the dangers it ran. Its rough and tumultuous course leaped beyond the bounds of reason from knowledge to love, from the absolute need for meditation to the absolute need for action. It yearned to embrace everything at once. During the last days of Ramakrishna's life

we shall often see Naren urging the Master to allow him the highest superconscious revelation, the great ecstasy, from which there is no return. *Nirvikalpa Samādhi*; but Ramakrishna emphatically refused him.

He had discerned the part for which Vivekanda was cast, and against his will he forced him to play it.

"Ordinary souls," he said, "fear to assume the responsibility of instructing the world. A worthless piece of wood can only just manage to float, and if a bird settles on it, immediately it sinks. At Naren is different. He is like the great tree unks, bearing men and beasts upon the bosom of the Ganges."<sup>11</sup> He had marked on the giant's forehead the sign : St. Christopher—the carrier of men.



# XI

## THE SWAN SONG

AND so from 1881 onwards he lived at Dakshineswar surrounded by disciples, who loved him as a father, lulled by the sweet murmur of the Ganges. The eternal song of the river, turning and flowing northwards with the incoming tide at noon, was the undercurrent of this beautiful companionship. And it mingled at dawn and sunset with the chime of bells, the blowing of conchs, the melody of the flute, (Rasunchauki), the clashing of cymbals and the temple hymns, that punctuated the days of the Gods and Goddesses.\* The intoxicating perfume of the sacred garden was borne like incense on the breeze. Between the columns

\* (The Gospel of the setting and

of matins. The lights were kindled in the hall of music the morning hymns were played by flutes accompanied by drums and cymbals. The east was not yet red before flowers had already been gathered in the garden as an offering. The disciples who had spent the night waked at the edge of dawn, naked as with the symphonies, then returned to their cells. The Master and the conversations continued overlooking the Ganges. At noon the bells announced the end of worship in the temples of Kâli and Vishnu and the twelve temples of Shiva. The sun burned down. The breeze blew from the south, the tide rose. After a meal the Master took a short rest and then the conversations began again.

of the semi-circular verandah with its sheltering eaning, sails, multicoloured like a swarm of butterflies, could be seen passing along the river, the image of Eternity.

But the precincts of the sanctuary were throbbing with the ceaseless waves of a different human river—pilgrims, worshippers, bandits, religious and curious persons of all sorts and conditions from the great neighbouring city or other parts of India, crowding to see and overwhelm with questions the mysterious man, who yet did not consider himself in any way remarkable. He always answered them in his charming patois with unwearied patience and that air of familiar good grace, which, without losing contact with the deep realities, allowed nothing to go unobserved in the scenes and the everyday people passing before him. He could both play the child and judge as the sage. This perfect, laughing, loving, penetrating spontaneity, to which nothing human was alien, was the chief secret of his charm. In truth such a hermit was very different from those of our Christian world! If he sought out and

from its swaddling clothes and wash away all stain, making a saint of a Guriash by his indulgent smile and his piercing and serene glance, would not admit into the air of the beautiful

At night the temple lamp-lighter kindled the lamps. One lamp burned in a corner of Hammakrishna's room where he sat absorbed. The music of conchs and the temple bells announced the evening service. Under a full moon the conversation continued.

garden of Dakshineswar, redolent of the scent of roses and jasmine, the morbid idea of shameful sin veiling its nakedness by an eternal preoccupation with itself. He said :

"Certain Christians and Brahmos see in a sense of sin the sum total of religion. Their ideal of a devout man is one who prays: 'O Lord, I am a sinner!' Deign to pardon my sins! . . .' They forget that a sense of sin is a sign of the first and the lowest step of spiritual development. They do not take the force of habit into consideration. If you say: 'I am a sinner,' eternally, you will remain a sinner to all eternity. . . . You ought rather to repeat 'I am not bound, I am not bound. . . . Who can bind me? I am the son of God, the King of Kings. . . .' Make your will work and you will be free! The idiot who repeats without stopping: 'I am a slave,' ends by really becoming a slave. The miserable man, who repeats tirelessly: 'I am a sinner,' really becomes a sinner. But that man is free who says: 'I am free from the bondage of the world. I am free. Is not the Lord our Father? . . .' Bondage is of the mind, but freedom is also of the mind. . . ."

He repeats this great saying, which I should like to inscribe on the heart of all believers: "God can never appear where there is shame, hatred or fear." (Sri Ramakrishna's Teachings, I, par. 216).

not blackberries but innumerable Sri Krishnas' . . .

And was there any need for pilgrimages to holy places?

"It is the sanctity of men that makes the sanctity of places. Otherwise how can a place purify a man?"

God is everywhere. God is in us. Life and the Universe are His Dream

But while with his clever finger he embroidered apologues upon this everlasting theme, the little peasant of Kamarpukur, who united in himself the two natures of Martha and Mary, knew how to recall his disciples to practical life and humble domestic details, he did not allow idleness, un-

Garden.

Nothing escaped his eyes. He dreamed, he saw, he acted, and his gay wisdom always kept the gift of childlike laughter. This is how he

"The friend replied "What harm have I done? It was only a dream"

"You do not understand," the wood-cutter answered "To be a king in a dream is as true as being a wood-cutter. It to be a wood-cutter is real, to be a king in a dream is real also." (The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna, II, p. 225)

The Martha and Mary of the Gospel according to St. Luke, Chapter X





his handcè . . . And do you think the dowry will be a large one? . . . Harish adores me, he cannot do without me for a single hour . . . I have not been able to come for a long time; the engagement of so-and-so's daughter has taken place and I have been so busy"—And ta, ta, ta. . . She came to bathe in the sacred waters, but she thinks of anything but that . . .

And at that point as his glance fell upon one of his audience, he passed into Samādhi.<sup>1</sup> When he returned again to earth he resumed the thread of his interrupted discourse without a break, or else sang one of his beautiful songs to the Mother "with the blue skin" or to dark Krishna the Beloved :

"Oh, the sound of the smooth flute played in the wood yonder! I come! I come! I must My Beloved with the dark skin awaits me. O my friends, say, will you not come with me? . . . My Beloved! . . . I fear that to you he is nothing but a name, a sound void of meaning. But to me he is my heart, my soul, my life! . . ."

"Plunge, plunge, plunge in the depths, O my soul! Plunge into the Ocean of Beauty! . . . Go and search the regions deeper than the depths of the seas! Thou wilt attain the jewel, the treasure of Prema (Divine Love) . . . In thy heart is the Brindaban (the legendary home) of the God of Love . . . Go and seek, go and seek!

<sup>1</sup> The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna, II, pp 281-6. These colours had a symbolic sense for Ramakrishna. The dark blue of the Mother brought the depths of the sky to his mind.

amused himself by mimicking worldlings and false zealots.

"The Master imitated a Kirtani (a professional

dressed and held a coloured handkerchief in her hand. If some venerable gentleman came in, she greeted him as she sang, and said to him: 'Please come in!' And she would raise her sari from her arm to show the ornaments adorning it. The Master's mimicry made the disciples roar with laughter. Paltu rolled upon the ground. The Master said, smiling at him: 'What a child! Paltu, do not go and tell your father. The slight esteem in which he holds me would vanish entirely. He has become an Englishman pure and simple' . . . ."

Here are some other types as he described them

"There are people," said Ramakrishna, "who never want to chatter so badly as at daily worship. But being forbidden to speak, they gesticulate and grimace with closed lips: 'Euh! Euh! Bring me this . . . . Pass me that . . . . Chut! Chut! . . . .' One is telling his beads; but while so engaged he sees the fish-monger, and while his beads slip through his fingers he has shown him the fish he wants. . . . A woman went to bathe in the sacred waters of the Ganges. She ought to have been thinking about God, but this is what she was gossiping: 'What jewels are they offering your son? . . . . Such and such a person all . . . . Such and such a person has gone to a

"My son, do you believe in God?"

"No."

"Do you believe in religion?"

"No, nor in the Vedas, nor in any Scripture. I do not believe in anything spiritual."

The Master indulgently replied:

"My son, if you had said that to any other Guru, what would have happened to you? But go in peace! Others have passed through these trials before you. Look at Naren! He believes. Your doubts will also be enlightened. You will believe."

And Kabirasad later became the holy apostle, Abhedananda

Many university men, sceptics and agnostics were similarly touched by this little man, who said the simplest things in his peasant's language, but whose inner light pierced to the depths of the soul. There was no need for his visitors to confess themselves

"The eyes," he said, "are the windows of the soul." He read through them at the first glance. In the midst of a crowd he could go straight to a bashful visitor, who was hiding from him, and put his finger on his doubt, his anxiety, his secret wound. He never preached. There was no soul-searching or sadness. Just a word, a smile, the touch of his hand, communicated a nameless peace, a happiness for which men yearned. It is said that a young man on whom his glance rested, stayed for more than a year in an ecstasy, wherein he did nothing but repeat:

"Lord! Lord! My well-beloved! My well-beloved!"

And thou shalt find    Then the lamp of knowledge  
will burn inextinguishably. Who is this being  
that steers a boat over the earth—over the earth  
—over the solid earth? . . . .”

“Companion of the Absolute, O Mother, Thou  
art plunged in the bliss of Play . . . . The wine  
of joy intoxicates. Thy feet reel, but never lose  
their balance. The Absolute, Thy husband, is  
lying at Thy side, motionless. Thou drawest Him  
to Thy breast, and lovest all control of Thyself.  
The Universe trembles beneath Thy feet. Mad-  
ness is in Thine eyes and in the eyes of Thy  
husband. . . . . In truth the world is a thing of  
joy . . . . O my Mother with the blue skin!  
. . . . .”

His song shares in the wine of love intoxicating  
the Mother . . .

“One of his glances,” Vivekananda once said,  
“could change a whole life.”

And he spoke from experience, this Narend-  
ra, who had upheld his philosophic doubts in pas-  
sionate revolt against Ramakrishna, until he felt  
the melting in his constant fire and avowed him-  
self vanquished. He had proved the truth of  
what Ramakrishna had told him: that “living  
faith may be given and received in a tangible  
fashion and more truly than anything else in the  
world.” Ramakrishna’s certainty was so gentle  
yet so strong that the most brutal denials of these  
young people made him smile; he was so certain  
that they would disappear like morning mist be-  
fore the midday sun. When Kaliprasad assailed  
him with a torrent of denials, he said:

## THE RIVER RE-ENTERS THE SEA

### XII

He was nearing the Ocean. The end was approaching. His feeble body was almost daily consumed in the fire of ecstasy and worn out by his constant gift of himself to the famished crowds. Sometimes like a sulky child he complained to the Mother of the flood of visitors devouring him day and night. In his humorous way he said to Her, "Why do you bring hither all these people, who are like milk diluted with five times its own quantity of water? My eyes are destroyed with blowing the fire to dry up the water! My health is gone. It is beyond my strength. Do it Yourself, if You want it done. This (pointing to his body) is nothing but a burst drum, and if You go on beating it day in and day out, how long do You think it will last?"

But he never turned anybody away. He said:

"Let me be condemned to be born over and over again, even in the form of a dog, if so I can be of help to a single soul!"

And again

"I will give up twenty thousand such bodies to help one man. It is glorious to help even one man!"



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ess of the  
in Pandy and  
same thing.

He even reproached himself for his ecstasies, because they took time that might otherwise have been given to others.

"O Mother, stop me from enjoying them! Let me stay in my normal state, so that I can be of more use in the world."

During his last days when his disciples protected him in spite of himself from the importunity of devotees, he said:

"How I suffer because no one needs my help today!"

His great friend, the illustrious chief of the Brahmo Samaj, Keshab Chunder Sen, preceded him in death. He died in 1884. With tears in his eyes, Ramakrishna said of him shortly before his death that "the rose tree is to be transplanted because the gardener wants beautiful roses of him."

Afterwards he said

"Half of me has perished."

But the other half, if it is possible to use such an expression, was the humble people. He was as easy of access to them, if not more so, as to the most learned; and among the familiar friends of his last years he counted, in the same category as the disciples so dear to his heart, simple people, madmen of God. Such a one was old Gopâler Mâ, whose simple story is worthy of a place among the Franciscan legends.

An old woman of sixty, widowed while still a girl, she had dedicated herself to the Lord. The hunger of her unassuaged maternal love had made



her for thirty years adopt the child Krishna, Gopala, as her own, until it had become a harmless manna. No sooner had she met Ramakrishna than his God-filled glance made little Gopala issue from her. The warm compassion of the Master, which made the hidden desires and sorrows of those who came near him his own, lent inspiration to the unsatisfied dream of the childless mother, and he put the God-Child into her arms. From that moment the little Gopala never left the mother, who had adopted Him. Henceforward she did not pray, she had no need to pray, for she lived in unbroken communion with her God. She threw her rosary into the river and spent her days prattling with the Child. This state lasted two months and then was mitigated, the Child only appeared in moments of meditation. But the old woman's heart was filled with happiness, and Ramakrishna tenderly regarded her joy. But his ever present sense of fun made him ask the old woman to tell her story to the haughty Naren, so proud of his critical reason, who held such visions to be stupid and morbid illusions. The old woman quite simply interrupted her maternal chatter, and made Naren her judge:

"Sir," she said to him, "I am only a poor ignorant woman. I do not rightly understand things. You are learned. Tell me, do you think it is true?"

Naren, deeply moved, answered,

"Yes, mother, it is quite true."

It was in 1884 that Ramakrishna's health took a serious turn. While he was in a trance

he dislocated his left arm and it was very painful. A great change took place in him. He dislodged his infirm body and his wandering soul into two. He no longer spoke of "I". He was no longer "me". He called himself "This". The sick man more intensely than before perceived "Lilâ . . . the Play . . . the God who disports Himself in men. . . . The man roughly seized his real Self and then fell into silent amazement; his joy knew no bounds, as if he had suddenly and unexpectedly met one of his dear ones. . . . When Shiva saw his real self he cried: 'Such am I! Such am I!' and danced for joy."

In April the following year his throat became inflamed. Overstrain from constant talking and

and ecstasy, but he paid no attention to them.

'But there was more in it than this. Like some famous Christian mystics\* he healed others by taking their ills upon himself. In a vision his body appeared to him covered with sores, the sins of others. "He took upon himself the Karma of others" and to this fact he owed his last illness. He had become the scapegoat of humanity.

The idea of suffering the ills of others in his own body, and thus relieving them when a certain degree of sanctity has been attained, is a very old one in India, and Swami Abhokananda, whom I have questioned on the subject, has given me some striking illustrations from the Holy Books—from the *Mahābhārata* (*Adi Parva*, Chapter 84, and *Shānti Parva*, Chapter 281)—from the sayings of Buddha, and the life of Chaitanya in the fifteenth century. All spiritual personages do not possess this power. It only belongs theologically to the *Avatāras* (Incarnations) and to the chosen souls, their attendants. Neither pious men nor saints possess it, even after they have attained divine realization, although popular superstition falsely attributes it to them in these days, and simple people may often be seen worshipping *Saṅnyāsins* and *Sādhus* (as also happened to them their physical

At a great Vaishnava religious festival he spent himself without measure, and in return the disease grew worse. It became practically impossible for him to eat. Nevertheless he continued to receive those who came to him day and night. Then one night he had hemorrhage of the throat. The doc-

and spiritual ill. It is still a common belief in India One of its consequences is the so-called *Guruvāda*. If a spiritual person accepts a disciple, not only does he give him spiritual instruction, but he takes upon himself everything that might be an obstacle to his disciple's Karma—all his sins. The Guru then has to suffer for the Karma of his disciples, for nobody can cancel a single Karma; it is merely transferred to another—Swami Ashokananda has added this to show to what point the belief of expiation by proxy is carried in the spirit of the best minds in India today. "It is not just a theory with us. We have seen examples of it as when the immediate disciples of Ramakrishna suffered for having been taken upon them selves the evils of others, either in their capacity as Gurus

into them, and St Vincent de Paul, who was deprived of his faith for seven years in order to obtain the faith of an unbeliever.

nature. (C) also the familiar words of Christ, when he instituted the Lord's Supper "This is my blood which is shed for many for the remission of sins." St Matthew, XXVI, 28)

tory diagnosed cancer. His chief disciples persuaded him to put himself for a time under the care of Dr. Mahendra Lal Sarkar of Calcutta. In September, 1885, a small house was rented where Ramakrishna's wife found a corner for herself so that she might supervise his régime. The most faithful disciples watched during the night. The majority of them were poor, and they mortgaged, borrowed or pawned their effects in order to pay the expenses of the Master's illness—and effort that cemented their union. Dr. Sarkar was a rationalist, who did not share the religious views of Ramakrishna, and told him so frankly. But the more he came to know his patient, the deeper did his respect for him become, until he treated him for nothing. He came to see him three times a day and 'spent hours with him' (which, it may be observed in passing, was perhaps not the best way to make him better). He said to him:

"I love you so dearly because of your devotion to truth. You never deviate by a hair's breadth from what you believe to be true . . . Do not imagine that I am flattering you. If my father was in the wrong I should tell him so."

But he openly censured the religious adoration rendered to him by the disciples.

"To say that the Infinite came down to earth in the form of a man is the ruin of all religions."

Ramakrishna maintained an amused silence,

<sup>1</sup> He was present during several ecstasies and studied them from a medical point of view. A study of his notes would be a great interest for European science. It is known that ophthalmoscope examination of the heart and the condition of eyes during Samādhi show all the symptoms of the of death.

but the disciples grew animated in these discussions, which only served to increase their mutual esteem, their faith in their Master, whom suffering seemed to illumine, was strengthened. They tried to understand why such a trial was imposed upon him, and divided into groups holding different views. The most exalted, headed by Gurish the redeemed sinner, declared that the Master himself had willed his illness, so that he might establish the communion of apostles round him. The rationalists with Naren as their mouth-piece admitted that the Master's body was subject to the laws of nature like other men's. But they all recognised the Divine presence in the dying man, and on the day of the great annual festival of Kâli, of which Hamakrishna to their surprise made no mention, but spent it absorbed in ecstasy, they realised that the blotter was indwelling within him. The exaltation excited by this belief had its dangers, the chief of them being

Indian Christians found it quite possible to believe at the same time in Christ and Hamakrishna. People were present during the following conversation

The Christian. 'It is the Lord, who shines through all creatures'

Ramayana. "The Lord is one, but He is called by a thousand names"

The Christian. 'The Christ'

be is God

and pointed

you see but

God Himself!

an access of convulsive sentimentalism. They had—or pretended to have—visions and ecstasies with laughter, song and tears. Naren then showed for the first time the vigour of his reason and his will. He treated them with contempt. He told them that “the Master’s ecstasies had been bought by a life of heroic austerity and desperate conflict for the sake of knowledge; that their effusions were nothing but the vapourings of sick imaginations—when they were not lies. Those who were ill ought to take more care of themselves! Let them eat more and so react against spasms which were worthy only of ridiculous females! And let them beware! Of those who encouraged a religion of ostentatious emotion eighty per cent became scoundrels and fifteen per cent lunatics.” His words acted like a cold douche. They were ashamed and the majority humbly confessed that their ecstasies were shams. Naren’s action did not stop there. He gathered these young people together and imposed upon them a virile discipline. In their need for action he advised them to devote themselves to some definite object. The young lion’s cub began to assert himself in those days as the future sovereign of the Order, although he himself was not free from his own difficulties and struggles. For him these days marked the crisis of despair, when he had to make the final choice between the conflicting forces of his nature—harrowing days, fruitful days, preparing the soul for harvest.

At the end of the interview Ramakrishna told him that his longing for God would be fulfilled. And the Christian gave him the gift of himself.

Ramakrishna grew worse. Dr Sarkar advised his removal from Calcutta to the country. Towards the middle of December 1883, he was taken to a house in the suburbs in the midst of the beautiful gardens of Cossipore, and there he spent the last eight months of his mortal life. Twelve of his young chosen disciples never left him until the end. Naren directed their activities and their prayers. They begged the Master to join with them in praying for his recovery, and the visit of a Pandit, who shared their faith, gave them an opportunity to renew their entreaties.

"The Scriptures," said the Pandit to Ramakrishna, "declare that saints like you can cure themselves by an effort of will."

Ramakrishna replied  
 "My mind has been given to God once and for all. Would you have me ask it back?"  
 His disciples reproached him for not wishing to be restored to health.

"Do you think my sufferings are voluntary? I wish to recover, but that depends on the Mother."

"Then pray to Her."

"It is easy for you to say that, but I cannot speak the words."

Naren begged

"For our sake!"

"Very well," said the Master sweetly. "I will try what I can do."

"Narendran, Rakhal, Baburam, Nityanand, Vogan, Latu, Tarak, the two Gopal, Raj, Sarat, Ramakrishna and that his illness had divided the disciples for him into those of the "Inner Circle" (Andaranga) and those of the Outer Circle (Baharanga)."





*that might have come from the Christian Gospel :*

The humble Latu and Sarat the Brahmin were taking advantage of the Master's absence to clean his room and make his bed. They heard the calls and saw the whole scene from above; but they continued their task of love, thus renouncing their share of joy

Naren alone remained unsatisfied. His father's loss, worldly cares and the fever in his own heart consumed him. He saw the fulfilment of all the others and felt himself abandoned. There had been no response to his anguish, no comforting ray to cheer him. He begged Rama-krishna to allow him to relieve his misery by several days of Samādhi, but the Master rebuked him severely (he kept his indulgence for those from whom he expected least) and reproached him for such "have thoughts" he must make some arrangement for his family and then his troubles would be at an end and he would receive everything. Naren wept like a lost sheep, and fled through Calcutta and the fields, covered with dust and the straw of a stack into which he had run; he groaned, he was consumed with desire for the unaccusable, and his soul knew no rest. Ramakrishna, tenderly and pityingly, watched his wild course from afar; he knew quite well that before the divine prey could be brought down *panting*, he would have to pick up the scent. He felt that Naren's condition was remarkable, for in spite of boasting his unbelief, he was homesick for the Infinite. He knew him to be blessed among men in proportion as he was proven. He softly caressed Naren's face before the other dis-

er gives. He grew up in him at the age of Bhakti—knowledge through love. The Bhaktas, unlike the Jnanis (believers through knowledge of the truth), do not seek liberation. They must be born and return for the good of humanity; for they are made for the love and the service of mankind. So long as an atom of desire remains they will be reincarnated. When all desires are torn from the heart of mankind then at last they will attain Mukti (liberation). But the Bhaktas never aspire to it themselves. And that is why the loving Master, whose heart was the home of all living beings, and who could never forget them, always had a preference for the Bhaktas, of whom the greatest was Naren.<sup>1</sup>

He did not hide the fact that he regarded him as his heir. He said to him one day,

"I leave these young people in your charge.

Busy yourself in developing their spirituality."

And in preparation for a monastic life he

ordered them to beg their food from door to door

without distinction of caste. Towards the end of

March he gave them the saffron robe, the sign

of the Sanyâsan, and some kind of monastic

imitation.

The proud Naren set the example of renun-

ciation. But it was with great difficulty that he

abdicated his spiritual pride. The devil would

have offered him in vain (as to Jesus) the king-

doms of this world, but he would soon have found

a chink in his armour if he had proposed sover-

eignty of soul to him. One day in order to test

his spiritual power Naren told his companion,

Kalpurasad, to touch him while he was in a state

of meditation. Kali did so and immediately fell

into the same state. Karmakrishna heard of it

and rebuked Naren severely for casting his seed

into the ground for a frivolous object, and he

categorically condemned the transmission of ideas

from one to the other. To attempt anything

against complete freedom of spirit was anathema.

You should help others, but you must not sub-

stitute your thought for theirs.

A little time afterwards Naren, while medi-

tating, had the sensation of a light shining behind

his head. Suddenly he lost consciousness and was

absorbed into the Absolute. He had fallen into

the depths of the terrible Nirvâkpa Samâdhi,

which he had sought for so long, and which Rama-

krishna had refused to allow him. When, after a long time he returned to himself, it seemed to him that he no longer had a body, but that he was nothing but a face, and he cried out: "Where is my body?" The other disciples were terrified and ran to the Master, but Ramakrishna said calmly.

"Very well, let him stay like that for a time! He has worried me long enough."

When Naren again came down to earth, he was bathed in ineffable peace. He approached the Master. Ramakrishna said to him:

"Now the Mother has shown you everything. But this revelation will remain under lock and key, and I shall keep the key. When you have accomplished the Mother's work you will find this treasure again."

And he advised him what to do for his health during the succeeding days.

The nearer he drew to his end, the more detached he became. He spread his serene heaven over the disciples' sorrow. The *Gospel*, written practically at the bedside of the dying man, records the harmonious murmurs of his soul like a stream in the night, amid the heavy silence of the apostles, while in the moonlight the branches of the trees in the garden rustled gently shaken by the warm breeze of the south. To his friends, his loved ones, who were inconsolable at the thought of his loss, he said in a half whisper:

"Radha said to Krishna, 'O Beloved, dwell in my heart and do not come again in your human form!' But soon she languished for the sight of the human form of her Beloved. But the will of the Lord had to be fulfilled and Krishna did not appear in human form for a long time . . . The Lord came and was incarnate in man. Then he returned with his disciples' to the Divine Mother."

Rakhal exclaimed, "Do not go away until we do!"

Ramakrishna smiled tenderly and said:

"A troupe of Bauls' suddenly entered a house; they sang God's name and danced for joy. Then they left the house as suddenly as they had entered it—and the owners did not know who they were."

He sighed.

"Sometimes I pray that the Lord will grant that I should no more be sent into this world."

But he went on at once:

"He (God) reclothes Himself with the human

created a better world. Our only refuge is the faith that it is I who can do everything."

To which the gentle Hiranda replied

"That is more easy to say than to realise." And he added proudly, "Thou (God) art everything. Not I, but Thou."

But the proud and headstrong Naren repeated

"Thou art I and I am Thou. There is nothing else but I."

Ramakrishna listened in silence smiling indulgently, and said pointing to Naren

"He is moving about carrying as it were a naked sword in his hand."

"In Hindu belief each Avatara (Incarnation) is accounted to earth by a train of elect souls, his disciples."

A Hindu sect, imbued with God, who have renounced the world

form for love of those pure souls who love the Lord."

And he looked at Naren with ineffable affection.

On the 9th of April Ramakrishna said, looking at the fan, which he was waving to and fro in the hot night :

"Just as I see this fan I am holding in front of me, I have seen God . . . And I see . . ."—he spoke quite low, laying his hand on Naren's and asked: "What did I say?"

Naren replied: "I did not hear distinctly."

Ramakrishna then indicated by signs that He, God, and his own self were one.

"Yes," said Naren, "I am He."

"Only a line intervenes—for the enjoyment of this," said the Master.

"But," said the disciple, "the great remain in the world even after they have realised their liberation. They keep their own ego and its offerings so that they may fulfil the salvation of humanity."

There was absolute silence and then the Master spoke again.

"The roof is within a man's sight, but it is very

The metaphor of the roof is often used in Ramakrishna's

difficult to reach it; . . . but he who has reached it can let down a rope and pull others up to him upon the roof."

This was one of the days when he realised in full the identity of all within the One Being, when he saw that "all three were the same Substance—the victim, the block and the executioner," and he cried in a feeble voice, "My God, what a vision!" He fainted with emotion, but when he came to himself he said "I am well I have never been so well." Those who knew how terrible was the disease from which he died (cancer of the throat) marvelled at the loving and kindly smile that never left him. If the glorious death upon the Cross was denied to this man, who is the Christ to his Indian followers, his bed of agony was no less a Cross. And yet he could say.

"Only the body suffers. When the mind is united to God, it can feel no pain."

And again  
 "Let the body and its sufferings occupy themselves with each other. Thou, my mind, remain in bliss. Now I and my Divine Mother are one for ever."

Three or four days before his death he called

"Kushon in this body lying here!"

Naren and asked to be left alone with him. He looked lovingly at him and passed into an ecstasy. It enveloped Naren in its folds. When he came back from the shadows, he saw Ramakrishna in tears. The Master said to him:

"To-day I have given you my all and am now only a poor fakir, possessing nothing. By this power you will do immense good in the world and not until it is accomplished will you return."<sup>1</sup>

From that moment all his powers were transfer-

But he added

"Not in your Vedantic sense" (That is to say, not merely in the sense of identity with the Absolute, but in the

other times as when a faithful follower (in 1880) said to him "When I see you I see God," he rebuked him: "Never say that. The wave is part of the Ganges, the Ganges is not part of the wave" (*The Gospel of Sri*

Himself only in part like honey in a flower—you suck the flower and get a little honey—in the Incarnation it is all

as in the case of Christ, when God becomes incarnate. (*Ibid.* 234)

"To the Absolute" is to be understood.





Sunday, August 15, 1886. . . The last day.

In the afternoon he still had the almost miraculous energy to talk for two hours to his disciples in spite of his martyred throat. At nightfall he became unconscious. They believed him to be dead, but towards midnight he revived. Learning against five or six pillows supported by the body of the humble disciple, Ramakrishnanda, he talked up to the last moment with Naren, the beloved disciple, and gave him his last counsel in a low voice. Then in ringing tones he cried three times the name of his life's Beloved, Kali, the Divine Mother, and lay back. The final ecstasy began. He remained in it until half an hour before noon, when he died. In his own words of faith: "He had passed from one room to the other."

And his disciples cried : "Victory !"

"not bear it. A doctor saw that it had stopped  
the Sumatran." later) cart

to Bhagawan Hanumantha as place of cremation, where his body  
ending

## EPILOGUE

THE man himself was no more. His spirit had departed to travel along the path of collective life in the veins of humanity.

The fellowship of apostles began at once; for the young disciples, the witnesses of his last months, found it impossible to return to the world. They were without resources. But four married disciples—Balaram Bose, to whom Ramakrishna's relics were entrusted for the time being, Surendranath Mitra, Mahendranath Gupta and Girish Chandra Ghosh, the converted comedian, encouraged them and helped them to found a home. Surendranath Mitra contributed money for the rent of a half-ruined house at Barânagore near the Ganges. This became the first Math or monastery of the disciples. A dozen or more gathered there under monastic cognomens which have hidden their real names from posterity. He who had been Naren, he who was and is for all time Vivekananda,\* put himself at their head by common consent. He was the most energetic, the most vital, the most intelligent—and the Master himself had nominated him. The others were tempted to shut themselves up in solitude and to allow themselves to be buried beneath an intoxicating stupor of memory and of grief; but the great disciple who knew better than they all the fascination but at the same time the danger of such a course, devoted

\* This was the name he adopted several years later. In the next volume I shall trace its origin.

himself to their instruction. He was like a tornado of fire in the midst of these hermits; he roused them from their sorrow and ecstasy; he forced them to learn the thoughts of the outside world; he flooded them with the refreshing rain of his vast intellect; he made them taste of all the branches of the tree of knowledge—comparative religion, science, history, sociology; for he wished them to gain a universal perspective, he led them to fruitful discussion without ceasing for a single instant to maintain the sacred fire.

It was at the symbolic season of Christmas, 1886, that the act giving birth to the Man-Gods was signed and sealed. The story is an arresting one, for it contains the thrill of an unforeseen encounter in the night between the "*Beau Dieu*" of the West and the Word of India.

They were assembled at Anupur in the house of the mother of one of the disciples (Baburam). "It was late in the evening when the monks gathered together before the fire. Huge logs of wood were brought by them and ignited, and soon a raging flame burned upwards, making the darkness beautiful by contrast. And overhead was the canopy of the Indian night, and all around was the ineffable peace of the rural stillness. Meditation began continuing for a long time. Then a break was made and the Leader (Vivekananda) filled the silence with the story of the Lord Jesus. From the very beginning, from the

wondrous mystery of birth it commenced. The monks were raised into beatitude with the Virgin Mary when the Saviour's coming was announced to her . . . The monks lived with Jesus during the days of His Childhood; they were with Him in the Flight into Egypt. They were with Him in the Temple surrounded by the Jewish Pandits hearing and answering their questions. They were with Him at the time when He gathered His first disciples, and they adored Him as they adored their own Master.\* The many points of similarity in thought and action as well as the relationship with the disciples, between Christ and Ramakrishna, forcibly brought to their minds the old days of ecstasy with their Master. The words of Christ the Redeemer rang upon their ears as familiar sayings."

And the story of the Passion, of the Crucifixion, threw them into the depths of meditation. Through Naren's eloquence they had been admitted to the apostolic circle where Paul preached the Gospel. The fire of Pentecost consumed their souls in the peace of the Bengal village; and the mingled names of Christ and of Ramakrishna stole upon the night air.

Then Vivekananda appealed to the monks. He besought them to become Christs in their turn, to work for the redemption of the world, to renounce all as Jesus had done and to realise God. Standing before the wood fire, their faces reddened by the leaping flames, the crackling of the logs,

\*Of two among them, Saibhushan (Ramakrishnananda) and Saratchandra (Saradananda), Ramakrishna had said that they had been the disciples of Christ in a former life.

the only sound that broke the stillness of their thoughts, they solemnly took the vows of everlasting Sanyāsa, each before his fellows and all in the sight of God

And it was not until that moment when all had been accomplished that the monks remembered that that very night was Christmas Eve.<sup>1</sup>

A beautiful symbol of profound significance heralding the Nativity of a new Day of God. . . . But Europe must not be misled when she reads this story. This was no return to Jordan. Rather it was the confluence of the Jordan and the Ganges. The two united streams flowed together along their wider river bed

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From its very inception the new Order had in it something that was unique. Not only did it contain within itself the energy of faith both of the East and of the West, not only did it unite an encyclopaedic study of the sciences and religious meditation, but in it the ideal of contemplation was wedded to the ideal of human service. From the first Rāmākṛishṇa's spiritual sons were not allowed to shut themselves up within the walls of a monastery. One after the other they went out to wander through the world as mendicant monks. Only one, Rāmākṛishṇanda (Sāhibuṣan), the guardian of the relics, remained in the dovecote whether the birds of passage returned from time to time for rest. During the last months of the Master's life the humble ideal of Māṛṭha had been adopted—"Dīnen . . . Dīnen"—to Serve (the

and on me is the responsibility."

Thus at the feet of the simple Ramakrishna the most intellectual, the most imperious, the most justly modern Paul G.

Church

out the world and was the aqueduct, akin to those red arches which span the Roman Campagna, along which the waters of the spirit have flowed from India to the Europe<sup>s</sup> and from the Europe<sup>s</sup> back to India, joining scientific reason to Vedic faith and the past to the future

It is this Journey of the soul that I intend to trace in a succeeding volume. In this present one I have led European thought to those far distant countries of religious mythology, where the Briar tree, the giant banyan, too often considered by the West to be dried up and withered, still continues to shoot out great flowering branches. I shall then lead it back by unsuspected

paths to its home where modern reason sits enthroned. And it will discover at the end of the course that between one country and another, the gulf of centuries separating them is, when subjected to the "wireless" of free understanding, no greater than a hair's breadth and the space of a second.

R. R.

Christmas 1928

## NOTE I

### SARADA DEVI AND THE BRIGANDS<sup>1</sup>

"In order to join her husband Sarada Devi had often to cross the plain between Kamarpukur and Dakshineswar on foot, and at that time it was infested with bands of brigands, worshippers of Kālī. . . .

"One day she was returning to Dakshineswar in the company of several others. She was so tired when night fell that she could not keep up with the rest of the little band and dropped behind. Soon they were lost to view and she found herself alone in complete darkness at the beginning of the dangerous plain. At that moment she saw a swarthy man coming towards her. He was big and strong and carried a club on his shoulder; he was followed by another figure. She saw that there was no possibility of escape and remained motionless. The man came up to her and said in a rough voice .

" 'What are you doing here at this time of night?'

"She answered him :

" 'Father, my companions left me behind and I have lost myself. Will you be so kind as to take me to them? Your son-in-law dwells in the temple of Kālī at Dakshineswar. I am going to him. If you will take me as far as that, he will be most grateful to you '

"At that moment the other figure came up. Sarada Devi realised with relief that it was the man's wife. She took her by the hand and said :

" 'Mother, I am your daughter Sarada. I am lost . . . and all alone. My companions have deserted



“When we separated,” so she told afterwards, “this single night had made us so dear to one another that I wept for grief when I said good-bye to them. I made them promise to come to Dakhineerst to see me. They followed us for some time. The woman picked a few green peas growing at the side of the road and strapped them in a fold of my sari, and said, ‘Mother Sarada, to-morrow when you eat your padded rice take these with it.’ . . . They came to see me several times at Dakhineerst and

duced her husband's parents to them and said :  
 " I do not know what I should have done, if they

"My daughter did not have much to eat yesterday. Go and fetch some fish and vegetables for her from the bazaar. She must have better food to-day."

"While the man had gone to fetch them, Sarada's companions came back to look for her. She introduced her Bagdi' parents to them and said :

me Fortunately you and my father turned up; otherwise I do not know what I should have done."

"Her simple ways, her absolute trust, and her sweet words touched the hearts of the man and woman They belonged to the lowest caste; but they forgot everything and treated Sarada as their daughter She was tired They would not allow her to continue her journey, they made her sleep at a shop in the neighbouring village The woman took off her own clothes in order to make a bed for her. The man brought her some pulled rice that he had bought at the shop They watched over her all night as if they had been indeed her parents, and in the morning they took her as far as Tarakeswar, where they begged her to rest The woman said to her husband :

brought me different presents. "He"<sup>1</sup> behaved towards them as if he were their son-in-law, and treated them with great affection and respect. . . . But although my Dacot<sup>2</sup> father was so good and simple, I suspect that he had more than once committed acts of brigandage.<sup>3</sup> . . . ."

(Adapted from *The Modern Review*, June 1927)

<sup>1</sup> "He," that is to say, "my husband." An orthodox Hindu wife must never name her husband

<sup>2</sup> Indian term for a brigand

## NOTE II

SRI RAMAKRISHNA AND KESHAB CHANDRA  
SEN

(By the Publisher)

It has been thought necessary to say a few words in relation of the charges brought by M. Romain Rolland against the followers of Sri Ramakrishna in Chapter VII, *Ramakrishna and the Great Shepherds of India*. The main charge is that the followers of Sri Ramakrishna claim Keshab to be one of his disciples, whereas "it is not true that any one of his (Keshab's) essential ideas was derived from him (Sri Ramakrishna), for they were already formed when he met Ramakrishna for the first time." At the outset we beg to state that not one of us looks upon Keshab as a disciple (as the word is usually understood) of Sri Ramakrishna. M. Rolland has further expressed regret that we have given a partial account of the relations between Sri Ramakrishna and Keshab. First then we would urge that it was not necessary for us to go into details, as Keshab's intimate associates themselves,—Pratap Ch. Mozoomdar, Gurish Ch. Sen, Churnob Sarma and others—have left clear statements about those relations. M. Rolland has rejected the testimony of those gentlemen. But we still maintain their accuracy and authenticity. Is it true that Keshab did not derive any ideas from Sri Ramakrishna and had formed all his ideas before he met Sri Ramakrishna? We do not think that there is enough evidence to support this inference. Keshab's mature thought found expression in what he called the New Dispensation. Was it conceived before Keshab met Sri Ramakrishna? The three

most important elements of that thought are: the worship of God as Mother, the recognition of all religions and prophets as true, and the assimilation of Hindu polytheism into Brahmoism. M. Rolland observes that Keshab did not require Sri Ramakrishna's help to arrive at the conception of the Mother, the idea was not created by Sri Ramakrishna. Quite so. But there is a world of difference between the *knowledge* of an idea and the *acceptance* of it; and Keshab's mere knowledge of the idea of the Motherhood of God does not prove that in Keshab's *acceptance* of that idea Sri Ramakrishna had no influence. Why did Keshab reject the idea when he became a Brahmo? And why did he afterwards return to it? What was the decisive factor in the reacceptance? M. Rolland mentions that the Adh Brahmo Samaj had accepted the idea of God's Motherhood, and Keshab himself had referred to it in 1866 and 1875. But it cannot be denied that such references were extremely rare and casual. It was only about 1879 that Keshab's worship of God as Mother became earnest and deep. The question naturally arises: what was the reason for this change in Keshab? We claim that it was the example and influence of Sri Ramakrishna.

We shall give only three quotations in confirma-

marriage\* had spontaneously suggested to him the necessity of regarding God as Mother. In his devotional colloquies he often addressed the Deity in various forms of the word Mother. And now the sympathy, friendship, and example of the Parama-

and carried the Motherhood of God into a subject of special culture with him. The greater part of the year 1910 witnessed this development. It came altogether a new feature of the Year which eschew was especially bringing about." On February 12th, Keshab wrote in *The Sunday Mirror*: "Let it readers accept the cheering message. A New dispensation has come down upon the Brahmo Samaj which proclaims a new programme to India. Its net merit is its freshness, and its one watchword is—*all its changes are good.*"

of the *Journal of the American Medical Association* (JAMA) and the *British Medical Journal* (BMJ) are the most widely read and cited medical journals in the world. The *JAMA* is published weekly, while the *BMJ* is published weekly in print and online. Both journals are owned by their respective medical associations. The *JAMA* is published by the American Medical Association (AMA), and the *BMJ* is published by the British Medical Association (BMA). Both journals are peer-reviewed and contain a wide range of medical research, clinical practice, and public health information. The *JAMA* is known for its high standards of scientific rigor and its focus on clinical research. The *BMJ* is known for its focus on public health and its commitment to providing high-quality medical education. Both journals are essential reading for medical professionals and researchers alike.

in the *Brahmo Samaj* in 1850.) In October, 1870, Keshab sent out a proclamation which contained the following passage: "Go and proclaim me Mother India," said the Lord to his disciples gathered round him. "Many are ready to worship me as their Father. But they know not I am their mother too, tender, indulgent, forbearing, forgiving, always ready to take back the penitent child. Ye shall go forth from city to city and from village to village singing my mercies, and proclaiming unto all men that I am India's Mother." (The passage speaks for itself. It is interesting to note that when this proclamation was published—in which Keshab also said

What is it but a prejudice to object to the application of the term 'Mother' to God?—many Brahmins characterised it as an "undisguised piece of blasphemy.")

With regard to the harmony of the great religions such as Hinduism and Christianity, and the assimilation of the different sectarian aspects of Hinduism, we hold that in this also Keshab was profoundly influenced by Sir Rammakrishna. At Holland's statement in these respects are vitiated by wrong dates.

In Chapter VI (*The Builders of Unity*) he has written that Keshab went on a missionary tour in 1873, during which he believed he had found the key to the popular polytheism; and that Keshab began to proclaim the New Dispensation in 1875. Both these are wrong dates. Keshab proclaimed the New Dispensation not in 1875, but on the 25th January, 1860. In order to be quite sure on this point, the editor of *Prabuddha Bharata* wrote to the editor of *Nata-Vidhan*, the organ of the New Dispensation Church. He gave him the latter date. It is true Keshab used the words *New Dispensation* in his lecture, *Behold the Light of Heaven in India*, delivered in 1875. But the lecture itself contained little or nothing of the teaching which he proclaimed later as the New Dispensation. It was devoted to the consideration of the proof of Divine existence and certain moral qualities which he said constituted a special dispensation of God at that critical period of India's history. There was no mention of the harmony of religions. M. Rolland mentions Keshab's lecture on *The Future Church* delivered in 1869 as another proof of Keshab's early conception of the harmony of religions. The lecture was not devoted to a visualisation of all religions as a vast symphony, wherein each one whole keeping its distinctive character, united in praise of God. In that lecture Keshab recognised that there is some truth in every religion. But he strongly condemned image-worship, pantheism and the idea of Divine Incarnation. He did not intend to maintain the different creeds intact in his Future Church. He wanted to extract the essence of the different religions and make that the cardinal doctrine of his Church. This doctrine according to him was the Fatherhood of God and Brotherhood of man. And he prophesied that "surely the future church of this country will be the result of purer

elements of the leading creeds of the day, harmonized, developed, and shaped under the influence of Christianity." Thus, it must be admitted, is far from the harmony of religions, even as Keshab afterwards conceived it. Our opinion is that Keshab was always more or less eclectic. Every founder of a new religious school is eclectic to some extent, unless he is extremely fanatical or original, for he has to accommodate the proved religious truths in his new religion. Keshab, it is true, was more than merely that. But until he met Sri Ramakrishna and watched him practising the harmony of religions, he did not possess a clear idea how to conceive and formulate it properly. Had it not been so, why did not Keshab preach the harmony of religions earlier than 1859?

Pratap Ch. Blozomdar has left a clear account of how the New Dispensation came to be proclaimed after this schism in his Church as a result of the Cooh Behar marriage and the persecutions to which he was then subjected, with their attendant suffering, he felt the need of a revival. According to Pratap: "One evening while Keshab lay in bed, and we had proceeded far into the excitement of such a talk, he suddenly got up and said, there must be a great and unprecedented Revival, if the Brahmo Samaj is to tide over the present crisis. In devotions, disciplines, doctrines and missionary activities, there should be introduced, all along the line such a spirit of Revival as had never yet been seen. We all concurred in the idea, but we did not perceive that what Keshab said was the result of long intense meditation and much earnest prayer, that it boded a kind of activity for which none was prepared." Pratap adds "When therefore Keshab spoke of a Revival in 1879, he meant a further advance, a greater advance than had been ever made before, on the lines of a new revelation, a new life, altogether a new departure."

The other witness is Prof. Max Müller. The quotation below is from an article, *A Real Mahatman*, which he had contributed to *The Nineteenth Century* in 1890, before he so much as knew any of Sri Ramakrishna's disciples. The Professor wrote :

,"Pratap Chunder Mozoomdar, the leader of the Brahma Samaj, and well known to many people in England, tells me of the extraordinary influence which the Mahatman (Sri Ramakrishna) exercised on Keshub Chunder Sen, on himself, and on a large

Keshub Chunder Sen during the last phase of his career. It was a surprise to many of Keshub Chunder's friends and admirers to observe the sudden change of the sober reformer into the mystic and ecstatic saint, that took place towards the end of his life. But although this later development of the New Dispensation, and more particularly the doctrine of the Motherhood of God, may have alienated many of Keshub Chunder Sen's European friends, it seems to have considerably increased his popularity with Hindu society. At all events we are now enabled to understand the hidden influences which caused so sudden a change, and produced so marked a deviation in the career of the famous founder of the Brahma Samaj, which has sometimes been ascribed to the break-down of an over-excited brain." (This clearly shows that Keshab's friends noted a sudden change of ideas and outlook in him towards the end of his life, and that he had not formed all his principal ideas, as M. Rolland contends, years before he first met Sri Ramakrishna in 1875.)

We must remember here that Prof. Max Müller was a contemporary and friend of Keshab and that he had been watching his career closely. But the verdict



quoted above seems to have caused a great sensation among the followers of Keshab. They appear to have sent him earnest protest against it and given him their own version of the interrelations between Sri Ramakrishna and Keshab. Max Müller, however, stuck to his own judgment which he considered correct, as is evident from his remarks in his book, *Ramakrishna: His Life and Sayings*.

Our conclusion is, therefore, that Keshab Ch. Sen was a great soul possessing a great religious genius with an inborn tendency towards eclecticism,—a fact which explains his extraordinary appreciation of Sri Ramakrishna; but that it was his association with Sri Ramakrishna that made him develop his eclectic outlook until it appeared in the form of the New Dispensation; further that with regard to the Motherhood of God and Hindu Polytheism, his assimilation of these two ideas was still more directly due to Sri Ramakrishna's example and influence.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

1. The chief source for the history of R is the great Biography, compiled from the of his disciples and published by the Swam nanda :

*Life of Sri Ramakrishna, compiled from authentic sources*,—one volume of 765 pa edition of the Advaita Ashrama (the centre of the Order), Mayavati, Almora, 1925. (Himalayan Series, No. XLVII).

It is prefaced with a short introduction b which I feel it is of interest to reproduce.

The story of Ramakrishna Paramahansa' story of religion in practice. His life enab see God face to face. No one can read the his life without being convinced that God alo and that all else is an illusion. Ramakris a living embodiment of godliness. His say not those of a mere learned man, but they a from the Book of Life. They are revelation own experience. They therefore leave on th an impression which he cannot resist. In th scepticism Ramakrishna presents an exampl bright and loving faith which gives solace t sands of men and women who would otherwis remained without spiritual light. Ramakrishn was an object lesson in Ahimsa. His love kn hmits geographical or otherwise. May his divi be an inspiration to all who read the following

6

M. K. GANDHI

SHRIMATI,  
Vargshreeish, Krishna I.  
Vikram Samvat, 1961

on the labours of Swami Saradananda, a direct disciple of the Master and the Secretary of the Ramakrishna Mission for more than a quarter of a century, on those of Ramchandra Dutt and of Akshay Kumar Sen, both of them disciples of Ramakrishna, on memories collected by Prynath Sinha (alias Gurudas Varman), a disciple of Vivekananda; on the Discourses of the Master taken down by Mahendra Nath Gupta

This compilation is valuable because of the religious care which has been taken to collect in it literally all the documents at first hand, which had been scattered abroad. But it is inconvenient because they are presented without any arrangement and without criticism. And the lack (up to the present) of an alphabetical index makes research into it very difficult.

2. *Of much greater value from the point of view of arrangement and reason is the work of Swami Saradananda. It consists of five volumes written in Bengali, which, however, do not give a consecutive and full account of the life. The story, unfortunately, interrupted by the death of Saradananda in 1927, stops short at the point when Ramakrishna during his last illness was moved to the garden of Cossipore, and therefore the last months are missing. The work is also incomplete with regard to Ramakrishna's discourses, with one or two exceptions, the most noteworthy being Vivekananda.*

The title of the series in Bengali is :  
*Śrī Rāmākṣha-āḍpṛasaṅga* [Discourse on the life (the play) of Ramakrishna.]  
 The titles of the 5 volumes in Bengali are as follows -  
 I and II *Gurubhāṣā* (Śrī Ramakrishna as Guru or Master).  
 III. *Vālyā-jāna* (the youth of Rama-

IV *Sādhakāitīkā* (Ramakrishna's *Sādhakā*).

V. *Pratyakāśa* (Ramakrishna in the form).

Only two volumes have appeared in English, the first written by Saradananda himself; the second translated from the original Bengali.

Some of the other chapters from the Bengali have been published in the *Reviews of the Krishna Order*, *Prabuddha Bhārata* (in part the relations of Ramakrishna with Vivekananda and in another English magazine).

Saradananda planned this work in the form of an exposition of the various aspects of his life, presenting it in the form of a consecutive narrative. The two first volumes in Bengali were written according to this plan. Then Saradananda changed it to the form of an ordinary biography. The third volume devoted to the youth, the fourth to the years when Ramakrishna was practising his *Sādhana*; it takes to the end of this exercise and to the first relation with the *Brahmo Samaj*, where the part played by Ramakrishna as a teacher (but not yet as a religious manifestation) is brought out. The fifth volume describes the Master in the midst of his disciples at the beginning of his illness. At this point he saw the death of the "Holy Mother" (Ramakrishna's wife) and then that of Swami Brahmananda, who with Vivekananda, had been the favourite disciple and the first Abbot of the Order. He was so overwhelmed with grief that he abandoned his writing work and gave himself up wholly to meditation.

Incomplete though the work remains, it is excellent for the subject. Saradananda is an authority both as a philosopher and as an historian. His books are full of metaphysical sketches, which place the subject

ance of Ramakrishna exactly in its place in the procession of Hindu thought.

various appear between the Bengali work and the *Life of Sri Ramakrishna* (No. 12).

It is the collective work of the Ramakrishna Mission, the latter must be given the preference (according to the evidence I have received from Swami Vivekananda), for it was drawn up with Swami Vivekananda's help after his own work

in the *Life of Sri Ramakrishna* (according to the Bengali work). The *Life of Sri Ramakrishna* (No. 12) is a son of the Lord and disciple, or the Ideal Man, as the Bengali work calls him, a son of the Lord and the world, 2 volumes, Madras, published by the Ramakrishna Mission, 1907, (reprinted by the Ramakrishna Mission, 1922-1923).

This (No. 12) is a valuable work and is a new edition in 1922-1923.

The fourth is the *Life of Sri Ramakrishna* (No. 13), the actually heard from the summer of 1883 for the first time, the actual and own work of Swami Vivekananda, treated in the course of the days

4. The *Life of the Swami Vivekananda*, by Eastern and Western Disciples, the Adhara Ashram, Himalayas, the semi-century birthday memorial edition, in three volumes, published by the Swami

Vivekananda from the *Prabuddha Bharata* Advaita Ashrama, Mayavati, Almora. Volumes I and II, 1914; volume III, IV, 1919.

This great life of Ramakrishna's chief is not only a capital interest for its own sake but of his Master, since it embodies his memories.

It is also useful to consult *The Complete Works of Vivekananda*, in 7 volumes. He did so of his Master with pious gratitude. He did him in particular a celebrated lecture in St. published under the title: *My Master*, in volume of the *Complete Works*.

3. *Sri Ramakrishna's Teachings*, 2 small volumes, 1910 and 1920, Advaita Ashrama, Mayavati.

These are a collection of thoughts delivered in the various Discourses of the Master, in particular in *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, and arranged in methodical order. It is especially valuable as a practical volume. It appeared piecemeal in *Review of the Order, Prabuddha Bharata*, and other Indian Reviews between 1900 and 1913. German edition is at the moment being prepared.

6. *Words of the Master (Selected Precepts of Sri Ramakrishna)*, compiled by Swami Brahmananda, 1924, Udbodhan Office, Baghbazar, Calcutta.

Another small anthology, chiefly interesting on account of the personality of the anthologist.

7. *Ramakrishna His Life and Sayings*, by Max Müller, Longmans, Green and Co., 1st edition, 1898, new edition, 1928.

Max Müller knew Vivekananda personally in England; and he asked him to give him a complete account of the life of his Master. His small work











